

RECONCEPTUALISING ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS: MAKING AN ARGUMENT FOR CRITICAL ACTION

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DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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ABSTRACT

On the surface the National Assessment Policy is transformative in nature because it promotes notions of shaping educational practice that will enhance the interests of learners in a meaningful way. It promotes ideas of transparency and a partnership between learners and educators that presupposes that learners are fully involved at every stage of their learning in decisions that affect their progress. This creates the impression that teaching and learning take place in a democratic environment where constant consultation and consensus are the order of the day. The policy ultimately envisages a kind of learner who would have the ability to participate as a critical citizen in society.

Looked at from a critical perspective, this criteria-referenced outcomes framework seems to be a contradiction to transformative policy and practice. The predetermined criteria outlined in the policy seem to negate its intention of creating a schooling system through which critical citizens can emerge. The focus of this thesis, therefore, is firstly to make a critical analysis of assessment in OBE and its stated transformation objectives and, secondly, to reconceptualise assessment practices in South African schools by making an argument for critical action. This analysis will explore the issue of power relations in the classroom and their impact on participatory, deliberative and democratic classroom interaction as a condition imperative for a transformative OBE curriculum. This issue is pertinent and central not only to the improvement and promotion of teaching and learning, but also because of the profound implications it has for how we view educational transformation in South Africa.

Key words: Assessment, educational transformation and critical action

OPSOMMING

Op die oog af lyk dit asof die Nasionale Assesseringsbeleid transformatories van aard is vanweë die feit dat dit aannames bevorder in verband met onderwyspraktyke wat leerderbelange op 'n bruikbare wyse uitbrei. Die beleid bevorder idees soos deursigtigheid en vennootskappe tussen leerders en onderwysers, wat veronderstel dat veral leerders ten volle en tydens elke leerfase by die besluitnemingsprosesse wat hulle vordering direk affekteer, betrek word. Dit skep die indruk dat leer en onderrig in 'n demokratiese opset plaasvind waar konsultasie en konsensus die orde van die dag is. Die beleid hoop om uiteindelik 'n leerder daar te stel wat die vermoë sal openbaar om as 'n kritiese burger in die samelewing te kan deelneem.

Vanuit 'n kritiese perspektief lyk dit asof hierdie kriteria-verwysende uitkomsteraamwerk kontradiktories is met transformatoriese beleid en gebruike. Die voorafbepaalde kriteria soos vervat in die beleid, blyk die intensie om 'n skoolstelsel te skep wat daarop gemik is om kritiese burgers te lewer, te ondermyn/nigeer.

Die fokus van die tesis is daarom eerstens om 'n kritiese analise van assessering binne UGO en die voorgestelde transformatoriese doelwitte en tweedens om assesseringsgebruike in Suid-Afrikaanse skole te herkonseptualiseer deur 'n argument aan te voer ter ondersteuning van kritiese aksie. Hierdie analise sal kwessies van magsverhoudinge in die klaskamer ondersoek asook die impak daarvan op deelnemende, beraadslagende en demokratiese interaksie as 'n kernvoorwaarde vir die implementering van 'n veranderde UGO-kurrikulum, ondersoek. Hierdie vraagstuk is sentraal nie net tot die verbetering en bevordering van onderrig en leer nie, maar ook omdat dit verrykende implikasies inhou vir die manier waarop ons onderwystransformasie in Suid-Afrika beskou.

Sleutelwoorde: Assessering, onderwystransformasie en kritiese aksie

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CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH DESIGN AND ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this thesis my aim is to examine whether assessment in outcomes-based education (OBE) as outlined in the National Assessment Policy can engender educational transformation in schools. This question is central not only to issues related to improving teaching and learning, but also because it seems to have profound implications for educational transformation. My view is that policies do not transform education, but if policies propagate the types of actions that begin to influence classroom practice and the relationship between teaching and learning, they can be seen as vehicles for transformation. It is only when policies enacted by the ruling class are understood and claimed by those who need to implement them that transformation has a chance of unfolding. Since one cannot divorce the curriculum from assessment, I have undertaken a cursory study of how the transformation agenda is concretised in the Revised National Curriculum Statement and, more specifically, how it manifests itself in the National Assessment Policy Statement. In particular, I have examined how the policy envisages an altered classroom environment, and challenges schools and educators to transform the school culture in ways that would educate learners for active and responsible citizenship in a democratic social order.

Educational transformation is regarded as the dynamic restructuring of the schooling experience, including the management of resources and knowledge within educational institutions (Salter & Tapper, 1981: 69). If the re-organisation of knowledge is central to the experience of schooling, then I need to ascertain how the reorganisation of knowledge has changed, how these changes have been translated into new educational and classroom practices and determine what impact these changes have had on teaching and learning. Salter and Tapper posit that change does not occur just because the dynamic exists, but rather in the way in which that dynamic is expressed or fails to be expressed in

the shift within the educational structure. In their words, “Unless other conditions for change are also met, the force of the dynamic will be either dissipated, thwarted or redefined and the potential for change will remain unrealized” (Salter & Tapper, 1981: 50). I shall explore what the “dynamic” is behind the change in the education system, what these “other conditions” necessary for change are, and how they are articulated in the National Assessment Policy Statement.

Educational change is not an isolated process that happens automatically, but a process that needs to be viewed against a broader framework of political transformation. Educational change can be considered as a process that is initiated or orchestrated by leaders and others in positions of power. Archer (1979: 2) supports this view when he states that change occurs because those who have the power to modify previous practices pursue new goals. It is imperative to explore or define the context in which educational change emerges in order to understand the reason for, and intention of, the change. In the context of South Africa, apartheid education was viewed by the oppressed masses as not representing their educational needs and interests. Education under apartheid was regarded as restrictive, repressive, dysfunctional, illegitimate and only serving the interests of a particular race group and class (White ruling class). The new democratically elected government was faced in 1994 with the challenge of moving away from this race-based education system towards a unitary education system. This was seen as pivotal to transforming South African society, especially to those who were engaged in the liberation struggle against the apartheid regime. The era after political transformation in 1994 was used to legitimate radical measures in education as an attempt to address the imbalances of the past. This attempt to transform education needed a vision for the future and a strategy to facilitate this vision that found expression in the design and development of an educational policy framework that included a new curriculum (Curriculum 2005) based on an outcomes approach to education (outcomes-based education/OBE). This policy framework gave teachers a mandate to engage in the tasks of teaching and assessment in a particular manner. This in turn implied a change in approach to teaching, learning and assessment. It is this policy mandate with its changed vision and intent that

needs to be defined and critically scrutinised in the context of educational transformation.

Salter and Tapper (1981: 87) view educational policy making as the process whereby various pressures for educational change are translated into formal governmental expression. This policy is endowed with legitimacy and power by the dominant political structure and takes place in a bureaucratic context that sets the boundaries within which the policy debate is conducted. This implies that policy emerges within the parameters of the state apparatus that arranges the agendas of negotiation and consultation between major stakeholders in education, and that controls the policy outcomes in various White and Green Papers entering the public domain for scrutiny and critique. This process of policy making, as outlined by Salter and Tapper, can be viewed as democratic if it is seen against the background of the needs expressed in the mass democratic movement in South Africa. If the agendas for change are managed by a bureaucracy regarded by the majority as progressive and legitimate, then it is plausible that, if those agendas are steered in a direction that would foster the kind of change believed necessary to transform society, they would be regarded as embracing the values expressed in the Constitution of The Republic of South Africa. While this process of policy making is important, this thesis will not examine who was consulted in post-apartheid South Africa and how broadly these consultations took place before culminating in the distinct policy that dictates the practices of teaching and learning.

In my attempts to determine whether assessment in OBE can engender transformation, I shall explore the guidelines for assessment as outlined by the Assessment Policy in the General Education and Training (GET) Band, for Grades R-9. For the purpose of this thesis I will focus specifically on the policy with regard to the Intermediate Phase (Grades 4 to 6).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The key question I shall explore in this thesis is whether the policy statements as outlined in the National Assessment Policy Framework are consistent with its

transformative goal of creating critical citizens (the “new South African”). Giroux (1983: 201) regards critical citizens as people who challenge the social, political and economic forces that oppress them and move them to act and think in ways that envisage different societal possibilities and ways of living. I argue that current assessment policy would not necessarily succeed in engendering critical thinking and learning. I contend that assessment policy as outlined in the document seems to emphasise the implementation of instrumental action through prescribed learning outcomes and assessment standards, which focus primarily on a set of prescriptions, which could undermine critical thinking and critical pedagogical practices. These prescribed outcomes evoke feelings and ideas of domination, control, conformity, delineation and routinisation. Giroux (1983: 214) posits that this notion of instrumental action represents a top-down approach that removes learners from any active participation in the construction of knowledge or the sharing of power. The notion of instrumental action will not be critically scrutinised at this stage, as it shall be dealt with in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

As a primary school teacher who has been grappling with assessment in outcomes-based education (OBE) for the past 4 years, I have discovered that different teachers approach the assessment task in different ways, unless they work in teams. Teamwork would imply that there is a set of norms and standards that provide a framework for assessment practices at schools. This refers to teachers in particular grades or phases not only sharing a common approach and understanding of the assessment process through consensus, but also of “teaching and learning, which becomes an integral part of a coherent curriculum” (Cochran-Smith, 1998: 941). Teamwork, however, does not imply that the assessment process becomes a mechanical task devoid of any contextual realities. Teamwork involves collaborative and collective planning for learning and teaching goals. Individual teachers cannot significantly improve their practices in isolation without discussions with professional peers. If educational change begins with the reflective and discursive consciousness of teachers as they deliberate together about problematic issues concerning the curriculum and pedagogical practices (Elliot, 1998: xiii), then the potential exists for teachers to shape their practices through proactive critical engagement.

In grappling with assessment in OBE, I started focusing on issues that hamper or restrain the way in which assessment is practised at my school and whether the understanding of assessment at school level actually promotes the intention of the policy (national and provincial). Areas of concern include the following:

- Assessment, both formative and summative, occurs only at specified times and is not continuous and ongoing as learners interact and engage with different concepts in the curriculum. I will explore whether continuous assessment only involves the continuous recording of a teacher's impressions of each learner's performance and progress (as is the case in the Foundation Phase) - or could it also involve a general comment at times on the conceptual understanding of the class as they interact with a body of knowledge? I would therefore need to explore what continuous assessment according to the policy actually implies;
- School management requires that assessment occurs in a very rigid, controlled and structured way at specified times. It would seem as if the recording of the "official" assessment result takes precedence, because of administrative demands, over the identification of gaps in a learner's progress and strategies for appropriate remediation. It would therefore seem that the assessment result is used more as a mechanical tool rather than a means of informing educators about the ability of a learner to progress from one activity to another in the curriculum as their understanding of concepts becomes more unclouded and as a tool to inform future teaching strategies and practices. This poses the question of whether teachers are serious in adapting their classroom practices in order to promote the interests of learners or are they assessing in order to complete schedules to fulfil administrative requirements as set out by the school management and the Department of Education? I shall explore how the policy views the purpose of assessment and whether the above practice actually detracts from the intentions of the policy or not;
- For the primary school teacher with possibly 40 learners to assess on a continuous and comprehensive basis, assessment becomes a cumbersome task and becomes almost impossible as learning areas (subjects) are broken down into multiple and detailed statements of attainment. This concern is further compounded by specific time allocations to each learning area, as well as by interruptions of educators and learners as they need to change classes. I

therefore start questioning the practice of assessment as a tool for effective record keeping, as time constraints do not allow for intensive feedback to learners about their performance and progress, or for consultation on strategies to address shortfalls;

- The overload on teachers is very real (Broadfoot *et al.*, 1992: 8) and it seems as if teachers are grasping for survival strategies to be able to cope with the demands that the school programme places on them, which involves other activities besides the core function and mandate of teaching, assessing and monitoring the progress and performance of learners. These survival strategies include carrying out assessment in a mechanical way in order to keep learners busy with the prescribed task and create a classroom regime of continuous administration for seemingly pseudo-achievement and measurement of outcomes. These strategies seem to negate the intentions of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) and undermine teachers' confidence and their ability to assess their learners;
- The amount of time teachers spend on developing and designing assessment tasks with appropriate assessment criteria for outcomes to be achieved by learners and the recording of the assessment results raises further concerns about when teachers can actually provide individual, developmental feedback to learners. At the same time this feedback needs to be accompanied by strategies for remediation and the adaptation of teaching and learning strategies to support learning, all of which requires recording as proof of action. Broadfoot *et al.* (1992: 8) posit that this adds to the administrative load and can be considered as a cumbersome task and could lead to cynicism about the whole process of assessment and the value of the formative nature of assessment will be lost. Broadfoot *et al.* (1992: 9) further state that this "turn off" from assessment can be counter-productive in the attempt to incorporate assessment into teaching and learning in ways that could lead to increased motivation and achievement;
- The preparedness of teachers to grapple with this new directive in the light of deficient training and limited participation in the formulation of the new curriculum and assessment procedures raises a concern. Has the pace at which the new curriculum and assessment procedures were introduced allowed teachers to extend or develop adequate skills to effectively engage in the

teaching and assessment tasks, or are they continuing to practise in the “old” way with new directives? Fullan and Hargreaves (1992: 38) posit that the decisive and most important aspect of change is how individuals come to terms with the reality of the change in the context of their own realities. Therefore “educational change depends on what teachers think and do” (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992: 38). In other words, the interpretation of teachers of what change means for them influences what they subsequently do and how they do it.

My sense of assessment practices in some primary schools – as ascertained from teaching at two separate schools and attending several workshops with educators from different schools – is that teachers seemingly do not have sufficient time to adequately assess learners and at the same time provide meaningful feedback that would impact on the progress and performance of learners in a constructive and meaningful way. OBE builds on the notion that useful feedback will be provided to evaluate and improve learning and teaching and that this would facilitate the process of learners achieving their full potential (Republic of South-Africa, 1996:13). This, therefore, implies that in their assessment practices teachers are seemingly doing a disservice to the learners and that learners are not obtaining the quality of education that OBE promises. I explore whether OBE is possible under the conditions mentioned or whether these conditions work against principles of OBE, thereby rendering it ineffective. If the latter is the case, then I also need to explore under what conditions would OBE be more viable.

I also raise the question of whether different interpretations of assessment by primary school teachers are as a consequence of not being adequately equipped to implement the assessment task that OBE requires. Do they possess the “tools” that would enable them to effectively engage in the assessment task? Could these assumed, ambiguous practices in assessment be the result of not many teachers taking the initiative, even in the light of deficient training and resourcing, to actually engage with the assessment task in such a way that it ensures consistency in approach (also in terms of regular action-feedback to learners) and coherent systematisation of knowledge and concepts that would

enable learners to achieve the expected outcomes? Cochran-Smith (in Hargreaves, 1998: 934) advocates this approach when stating that teachers who view themselves as change agents will participate as learners rather than experts. Teachers should therefore take responsibility for their own re-skilling and be prepared to “reshape themselves” (Waghid, 2002: 84). I explore whether assessment in OBE is amenable to allowing teachers to transform themselves and act as agents of change.

Many factors could impede the teacher’s ability to ensure that the assessment task is effectively executed. Constraints and constrictions can occur because of administrative overload, the nature of the timetable, time allocated per learning area, unclear procedures for continuous assessment, poor teacher-pupil ratios and lack of resources. Whatever the case might be, it is important to determine how the Assessment Policy Framework relates to this and what impact it has on transformation of education in South Africa.

The problem that this thesis therefore wishes to explore is whether the National Assessment Policy objectives can engender educational transformation.

1.3 PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Since one cannot divorce teaching and learning from assessment, I shall explore the degree of consistency between the curriculum policy and the assessment policy. If the purpose of assessment is to support students’ learning on a day-to-day basis and also used to inform teachers about the impact of teaching on learner performance, then assessment can be regarded as one of the most potent transformatory tools of education. Therefore, assessment should be regarded as a tool to improve teaching and learning effectively, and any policy that propagates this notion and puts guidelines in place to facilitate this process significantly contributes to educational transformation.

If assessment is considered as one of the tools for transforming education, one needs to look at how this transformation is manifested through the Assessment Policy itself, or more specifically the South African Assessment Policy. I would

therefore need to scrutinise the National Assessment Policy and determine the extent to which it meets the criteria of transformation in terms of its conceptual formulation and its intended outcomes.

The assessment policy will be scrutinised to determine whether it is aligned to and complies with a democratic ethos as embodied in the Constitution of South Africa, or is it just a document that implies change from one system to another? Furthermore, what should emerge from this thesis is whether policy regards assessment as a control mechanism of learners' performance, or as a strategy to gauge a learner's level of development at a certain juncture. If the assumption that assessment gauges a learner's level of development is the norm, teachers will use the assessment result to inform the types of intervention strategies to be used, in order to address gaps in teaching and learning, or for further knowledge progression. This would therefore clearly outline whether assessment is regarded merely as a tool to manipulate the progress of learners, or as a means of adapting teacher practice to advance the interests of learners.

What should emerge is an indication of whether the policy consciously promotes the teacher's awareness of teaching practice when involved in the assessment process. What will begin to emerge is the way that the policy encourages teachers to assert their leadership position in the classroom in an attempt to create a democratic environment.

This will hopefully illustrate that learners, at every stage in the assessment process, are actively involved in and are clear as to how and on what they are to be assessed.

The way that the Assessment policy supports issues of inclusivity will also start to emerge and will be reflected in that way that it promotes practices of diversifying assessment strategies, which are intended to accommodate learners of different ability groups and learning styles. This would not imply a compromise regarding the outcomes to be achieved, but rather the employment of different strategies by teachers to achieve the same outcome. This practice therefore makes

inferences about learner participation, in that learners are provided with choices (alternatives) on the basis of their needs.

The assessment result underpins the whole purpose of assessment, namely, that of being used to inform learners about areas where support is needed and strategies for intervention required. The assessment result will also inform teachers about teaching strategies required for effective learning. What the policy propagates for teachers to do with the assessment result will start to expose the transformative intent of the policy or not.

In essence, the basis of this thesis is an exploration of the correlation between OBE objectives, assessment policy and critical views of educational transformation.

This brings me to a discussion of the research methods to be used in my inquiry.

1.4 RESEARCH METHODS

Research methods refer to the techniques I use in an attempt to answer my research question. Therefore, in order to determine whether the assessment policy is critical, I shall use two methods: conceptual analysis and deconstruction. Conceptual analysis enables me to form an idea of how policy makers and/or departmental officials understand the assessment policy and what they apparently expect teachers should know about assessment policy. Through these methods I shall attempt to show that the guidelines and criteria outlined in the policy documents lend themselves to being used instrumentally – which is counter-productive to transformative notions of education. In adopting a deconstructive approach, I shall venture to look beyond what the policy seems to propagate - i.e. producing technicians (teachers who can record scores well) and learners who might be eligible to be taken up into a labour market economy with skills, but not critical enough to look at creative possibilities of transforming society in a democratic South Africa.

Conceptual analysis will allow me throughout this thesis to use the exposition of certain concepts as used by various authors and philosophers in the context of pedagogical transformation. Hirst and White (1998: 34) posit that conceptual analysis “helps us to pin-point more precisely what is implicit in our moral consciousness. It enables us to stand back and reflect on the status of the demand to which the word bears witness”. Hirst and White (1998: 35) go further by stating that conceptual analysis enables us to use words in relation to the principles that guide their use and supply theoretical explanations and justifications for practical actions. We use language not only to explain and justify our actions and our perceptions, but also to express our ideas and beliefs. Therefore, the analysis of language is important to reflect the depth of our understanding about these ideas.

Conceptual analysis gives us a much clearer understanding of the type of actions and practices that influence the relationship of the curriculum, teaching, assessment and the power relations in the school and classroom, as these are imperatives for the success or failure of educational transformation.

Moreover, it is my view that deconstruction is an important tool to guide educational research, as it has the potential to help us ask questions about issues we have not thought about and issues that are not overt but hidden and silent in our practices and discourses. Deconstruction further helps us to define the politics in our practices and move towards understanding the shortcomings of theories of political transformation (Lather, 1991: 156). Derrida (in Caputo, 1997: 5-7) views deconstruction as continuous questioning and criticising in order to clarify notions and discover new connections in order to transform, create something new and to open texts and institutions to their own future. Therefore deconstruction allows us to scrutinise texts and ask questions that create tensions between the existing and the new.

We, therefore, need to critically deliberate about these issues or else they will remain repressed and unheard in our efforts to liberate ourselves from domination, manipulation and control.

This brings me to a discussion of my research methodology.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology I intend using will ground this thesis in a particular paradigm that would supply the theoretical framework and highlight the thrust of the thesis. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999: 36) define paradigms as “systems of interrelated ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions” that act as a set of perspectives that provide reasons for the research and a logical basis for a course of action. They commit the researcher to specific methods of interpretation that are critical and central to the research design because they impact on the nature of the research question and on the way in which the questions are to be studied.

This thesis will be grounded in a critical paradigm, but at the same time in a constructivist mode. While it is important to critically examine and analyse the National Assessment Framework, it is also important for me to offer possibilities that could render the assessment policy more transformative so as to impact on learning and teaching scenario that will engender critical citizens as envisaged by the current assessment policy.

Critical theory, according to Waghid (2004: 10), involves different ways of thinking about education to solve specific social problems. He goes further by stating that this is done with the intent of liberating ourselves from all forms of domination. He sees critical theory as a form of oppositional thinking where everything is questioned through a process of reflexive thinking. This would have an emancipatory effect, as it constitutes the continuous critical investigation and examination of notions and practices that distort the relationship between teachers and learners. Carr and Kemmis (1986: 197) concur that a critical approach to education produces critical action in others and creates conditions to replace distorted practices with practices that are hopefully considered less distorted. Therefore critical theory enables us to ask questions about education, and its practices and policies so as to generate new ideas and knowledge that

could possibly impact positively on our practices and shed light on problems and issues that need to be addressed.

Critical enquiry is necessary to gain clarity and unpack concepts clearly outlined in the topic as well as those that are hidden and obscure. Approaching this thesis within a critical paradigm will assist in developing a clear understanding of these concepts in the context of social and pedagogical transformation. It will also enable me to look critically at those practices that shape the interaction between teachers and learners, with the intention of improving practices, thereby making the assessment experience more meaningful to both teachers and learners, and altering the power relations in the classroom towards becoming more democratic, participatory and transparent.

In summary, I have outlined the methods and methodology to be used to address my research question, namely whether current assessment policy can engender transformation, taking into account its instrumentalist tendencies. I shall now outline how I would address this concern.

1.6 PROGRAMME OF STUDY

In Chapter 2 I shall explore factors that gave rise to the transformation of education in South African schools. Specific attention will be given to the National Assessment Policy Framework, including an exploration of its intentions.

As one cannot divorce the curriculum, which is the framework for education delivery in South Africa, from assessment, I undertook a cursory study of the way that the transformation agenda is concretised in the Revised National Curriculum Statement, which manifests itself in the National Assessment Policy Statement.

In Chapter 3 I shall conduct a case study with teachers about their feelings and views on assessment in OBE. I shall further record, interpret and analyse their responses on the teaching and learning experience in OBE, and in particular their feelings and views about assessment and the curriculum. In this chapter I shall

also argue why critical action in the light of the interviewees' responses is important.

In Chapter 4 I shall explore critical notions of transformative educational practice because criticism is not only central to any educative practice such as assessment, but actually undermines the instrumentalist actions that seem to dominate current assessment policy.

In Chapter 5 I shall attempt to reconceptualise the National Assessment Policy Statement in relation to transformative pedagogical practices. I shall further argue how critical assessment action(s) depart(s) from instrumental action and also show how it can potentially improve assessment practices in classrooms.

In Chapter 6 I shall offer possibilities according to which the current assessment policy can be made more transformative so as to engender critical citizens, and more specifically learners and teachers. This will not only lend itself to possibilities and ways of thinking about education that will harness a spirit of democracy and citizenship education, but it also holds much promise for critical and non-instrumental teaching and learning.

CHAPTER 2

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I shall analyse and deconstruct current assessment policy, with reference to the National Assessment Policy Framework in the intermediate phase (Grades 4-6). I shall explain why assessment policy is overwhelmingly linked to instrumentality and why this is potentially harmful to education. Then I shall argue that policy needs to be reconceptualised in terms of criticism and action. Because the curriculum cannot be separated from assessment, I shall analyse those sections of the curriculum policy that impact on teaching, learning and assessment, and show how notions of instrumentality could actually constrain the development of critical citizens. Before attempting to do this I shall explore some of the factors that gave rise to OBE in South Africa and gauge how the assessment policy envisages transformative classroom practices, which are imperative for educational transformation in this country.

2.2 FACTORS THAT GAVE RISE TO EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

In 1994 a new period of democratisation dawned upon South Africa. This period changed the landscape of society and was marked by the introduction of a series of new policies that were intended to transform the country and cultivate South Africans who adhere to the principles and practices of democracy. Democratic practices would involve consultation in decision-making processes pertaining to teaching and learning, allowing learners to express their opinions, free of intimidation and creating spaces to accommodate the diversity of learners.

In education OBE emerged as the policy framework that was intended to transform the education sector. Because the Department of Education receives its mandate from the Constitution of the country, the principles and values of democracy embraced in the Constitution, such as freedom, justice, equality and

dignity, should therefore underpin education. This means that the status quo of education was destined to change. By implication, this refers to modified classroom practices for both teachers and learners, which marks a new approach to teaching, learning and assessment.

One also needs to take cognisance of the fact that this restructuring of education took place against a backdrop of disparate social and economic inequalities, prompting the hope that everyone would have equal access to opportunity through education. This would hopefully open the doors to learning for all, thereby ameliorating the social and economic conditions of the disadvantaged masses.

Because the acquisition of knowledge is regarded as central to the experience of schooling, the introduction of OBE restructured the content and the way in which knowledge was organised. Salter and Tapper state that the reorganisation of knowledge is not only the criterion for effective change, but that the “reorganisation of those social forces which determine the authority patterns and the structure of knowledge” are also key determinants for effective change (1981: 21). Teachers do not effect change only by reorganising the curriculum with different content, but the manner in which teachers communicate with learners and allow them to become active participants in their own learning has the potential to start altering the schooling experience for learners towards becoming more meaningful and relevant. The way that the policy proposes the configuration of the relations of authority will determine the power relations that play themselves out in classrooms between teachers and learners in order to create a more democratic learning environment.

Educational change is not something new. What is new is the way in which changes are introduced and imposed through governmental legislation. There seems to be a universal trend to move more and more towards system-wide educational change (Fullan, 1999: 2). Broadfoot *et al.* (1988: 266) concur with this notion in stating that these changes reflect a universal tendency towards centralised control of education. My view is that this process of centralisation culminates in policies that symbolise the administrative power of an education

department over schools. This results in the state determining the ethos and assumptions of the way that education should be developed. On the one hand, especially during a period of political transformation (as was the case in South Africa), it becomes imperative for a government to ensure that everyone is guided by the same rule of law. On the other hand, this law must not contradict and work against the very principles and values it is trying to engender, particularly that of cultivating a critical citizen.

The way that the policy makes provision for schools to deal with issues of curriculum and assessment will indicate whether this departmental power filters down to the agents of delivery and change (schools and teachers), or whether power become a force that restricts and stifles potential creativity and innovation. The way that the policy proposes that the agents of change interact with, interpret and implement the policy will determine the latter's potential to serve as a vehicle for transformative school and classroom practices. Intrinsic in this argument are the assumptions that:

1. State policy can contribute to transformation by consciously creating the freedom to explore; and
2. That the propensity for transformation exists by definition at school level, where the agents of change function.

Teachers act in terms of a policy framework given to them by the education authorities. Potential difficulties in this regard are three-fold:

- (1) At macro level (national level) – if the conceptualisation of the policy is not complete, then it can impact negatively on practice on the school level and classroom;
- (2) Similarly at school level, depending on how school management bodies understand the policy, they will try and 'operationalise' the policy in terms of their understanding of what the policy says, and will try to fill in the gaps they perceive in the policy. Therefore, the school's interpretation of the policy can deviate substantially from the National Policy Framework. On the one hand, this could have positive effects in that it could culminate in organic forms of a policy put into practice. On the other

hand, it could completely digress from policy and disregard important values that are meant to engender an ethos of democracy; and

- (3) On the third level, if the teacher does not also familiarise herself/himself with the policy in general, it will mean that the teacher clearly will not have an adequate understanding of the policy and what it was intended to achieve. What could happen is that teachers take a short cut by implementing policy in the classroom that could result in a dilution of the primary objectives of the policy.

This obviously raises a dilemma. Should a policy be so detailed that there is no room for local interpretation and innovation, or should a policy be broad enough to encourage local innovation within a broad policy framework? If the former is the case then it becomes oppressive, reducing teachers to mere technicians. If it is innovative, then the policy would make provision for schools and teachers to adapt the policy to suit their own realities.

If policy culminates in transformative classroom practices, which entails interactive participation, reflection, consultation and transparency, then the change in policy can be regarded as justifiable, in that it would assist in the development of critical citizens. If the policy does not facilitate transformative classroom practices, then this change of policy can be regarded merely as a change from one rigid system of operation to another.

Because the assessment policy cannot be divorced from the curriculum, it is important to understand how the transformation agenda is concretised in the Revised National Curriculum Statement, which manifests itself in the National Assessment Policy Statement.

2.3 THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM STATEMENT GRADES R – 9

The background report of the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) refers to major changes effected in education which were meant to transform teaching and learning in South Africa. I think it would be apt to stop at this

juncture to explore possible perspectives of learning, a concept used so loosely when reference is made to the essence of education.

Easterby-Smith et al (1999: 76) states that learning has a social aspect, as people do not learn in isolation from others. This would imply that learning takes place in a domain of collective human actions and interactions, creating or developing meaning in conjunction with others, therefore making learning a process of social construction. This further implies that within this realm of interaction the potential exists for learners' minds, thinking, attitudes and habits to be influenced. Although this approach can lead to a shared vision, the danger also exists that the mind can be controlled or manipulated to attain specific outcomes that could lead to conformity or even indoctrination.

Dewey (1966: 16) defines learning as a "continuous reorganisation and reconstruction of experience". This implies that learning takes place all the time as people interact, reflect and think which makes his or her notion of learning a reflective process that continually culminates in new ways of thinking or doing. Although learning takes place in social contexts, this notion of learning emphasises the development of individuals who reconstruct their experiences through continuous social interaction. Dewey (1966: 140) further states that this learning from experience entails the continuous trying or experimenting with ideas and actions so as to create meaning of the world or reality. This would imply continuous reflection on previous ideas and actions that would lead to the reorganisation of our experiences. This approach does not treat action and thinking as two separate entities, but sees both action and cognition as forming part of an inter-related process of learning, because one cannot think without action or act without thinking. While we function within social contexts to create meaning, we engage with others not purely out of altruism, but with the intention of developing ourselves and our own thinking and understanding of the interconnectedness of our world. If the policy intends to enhance the learning experience, it needs to envisage a classroom context that will ensure that thinking and action do not become fragmented, compartmentalised components. It needs to create a synergy between the two, so as to create an environment for

continuous reflection that would alter the learning experience, thereby promoting learning.

Because constant reference is made to the concept of transformation, I shall explore notions of what it involves. According to the South African Concise Oxford Dictionary (Pearsall & Bailey, 2002: 1247), transformation is a marked change in nature, form or appearance. To change in nature would imply that the inherent features, qualities, character and practices of a person would become different. To change in form would refer to new methods, procedures and conventions (a way in which something is usually done). A change in appearance would involve a different way of acting or performing (doing or practicing). If a change in beliefs takes place, it implies that one develops a different set of values that serve as impetus for the transformation process. It is these values that would change one's ideology and practices. Van Niekerk (1998: 61) posits that transformation needs to be seen against the background of the future goals we wish to achieve, as transformation is not a goal in itself, but the goal would be aspiring towards a more just and equitable society. The curriculum policy statement resonates with the language of democracy, respect, justice and equity, and should therefore promote the kind of practices that would engender or foster these values in the classroom.

Fullan (2001: 84) concurs with van Niekerk's notion of transformation when stating that transformation in education involves a change in learning and interaction – a process of developing new meaning, new behaviour, new skills and new beliefs. The assumption would therefore be that the mode of operation in classrooms pertaining to teaching and learning would change profoundly. The above perspectives of a transformed learning environment would imply that teachers and learners would engage differently with knowledge constructs, as well as interact and communicate differently with each other. If these new forms of thinking and doing which involve behaviour, practices, communication, strategies and beliefs were not directed at advancing the interests of learners, then this new way of doing and thinking can potentially work against transformative objectives.

2.4 THE RATIONALE FOR EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

The RNCS emphasises the fact that this new curriculum is based on an outcomes-based approach to education. Before exploring what OBE entails, I need to outline part of the government's rationale for transforming education in South Africa, as set out in the White Paper on Education and Training (R.S.A., 1995: 15-23):

- (1) South Africa's entry into the global economy makes competition against other countries for part of the world trade a reality. This makes economic growth and job creation imperative and would necessitate a new system based not only on nationally accepted outcomes, but also outcomes which are internationally accepted;
- (2) The demand is placed on schools to turn out young people who are equipped to compete in the job market. Therefore, the integration of education and training through a process of life-long learning and development is essential. This would require that education conflates aspects of academic and applied knowledge, theory and practice, and knowledge and skills; and
- (3) The need to reconstruct South African society, based on principles of equity, redress, non-discrimination, democracy, access and justice is fundamental. The new system (OBE) is expected to facilitate a high quality of education for all, irrespective of age, gender, race, colour, religion, ability and language.

It would seem as though a main consideration for systemic change was the rapid globalisation of the economy. This necessitated an education system that would ensure that learners acquire skills and knowledge to function in the globalised economy. Schooling therefore becomes a marketable commodity. My problem with this rationale for change is that, on the one hand, schools need to reconstruct society based on principles of equity, non-discrimination and access. On the other hand, learners would be schooled to serve the needs of capital making schools agencies of capital reproduction (Apple, 1982: 1-37). The nature of capital-reproducing structures of inequality, domination and exploitation would be in direct contradiction to principles of equity, redress and liberation. While schools are seen as channels of amelioration by assisting learners to gain a

better understanding of knowledge constructs that would lead to better insights and personal development, they are also expected to perpetually reproduce an unequal society. This inequality is perpetuated by practices such as sorting or grading (coding) learners on different levels and by awarding merits to learners for excellence in different learning areas. Apple (1982: 14) corroborates this notion when stating, “they sort, select, and certify a hierarchically organised student body and for legitimation they maintain an inaccurate meritocratic ideology and, therefore, legitimate the ideological forms necessary for the recreation of inequality”. This raises the question of whether knowledge that is taught in schools does not consciously shape learners into passive subordinates who would be able to fit into this unequal system? Would teachers also not act out practices of control, domination and subjugation in classrooms, and would this not undermine the principles of democracy? It would seem as if learners are regarded as objects to control and not rewarded or accredited according to their own interpretations, but according to the expected interpretations of work specified for them by their teachers and as set out in the Curriculum Policy Statement, in the form of expected outcomes. If learners are not given the opportunity to act within an environment where they have the freedom to interact with knowledge constructs and give feedback on how they experience their own learning through research and exploration, then the potential exists that this could culminate in the erosion of democratic principles that promote participation and freedom of speech.

This systemic change in education resulted in a single national qualifications framework that legitimised the introduction of new subjects, the re-organisation of knowledge foci, new forms of teaching, learning and assessment, and new education goals. My view is that the inclusion of new subjects in the curriculum is meant to encourage learners to develop knowledge and skills, not only for the open labour market but also for self-employment purposes. The reality is that the state cannot provide jobs for all its people, because it does not have control over the economic resources to facilitate this process. The means of production are still in the hands of multinationals and conglomerates, or people who have been economically advantaged by the apartheid regime. It is also not in the interest of the globalised, capitalist economy to absorb all workers into the labour market,

because the more people who are unemployed, the more the market can respond in a push-and-pull fashion in order to maximise profits and productivity.

2.5 OBE – THE NEW EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

This brings me to the notion of what OBE entails. Spady and Marshall (1994: 1) perceive OBE as an approach where the desired result is known in advance. They describe outcomes as a demonstration of learning at the end of a learning experience. This result is visible in a written, oral and demonstrative form. This implies that learners are taught concepts with the result, to be demonstrated, in mind. This notion of teaching learners with the end result in mind smacks of instrumentality as it removes learners from their own learning and minimises the creation and re-creation of knowledge.

The core of OBE is the demonstration of competencies in terms of pre-determined outcomes and assessment standards of specified learning areas (subjects). The prescribed learning outcomes and assessment standards outlined in the RNCS define what is considered as knowledge and determine what is to be learned. At the heart of South Africa's OBE is the emphasis that this approach is learner-centred, which denotes that the advancement of learners is at the core of education. Criteria and outcomes are statements of educational intent and objectives that are grounded in the assumption that the purpose of education is to help learners to develop and change. They are to become different to what they were, developing their existing qualities and abilities by acquiring new ones. These outcomes can be considered as the aims or objectives of education. Rowntree (1977: 90) defines objectives as being skills, knowledge, abilities and understanding that learners are expected to acquire in the process of teaching and learning. This notion reduces the teaching and learning experience to predetermined prescriptions that forecast the outcomes, before engaging in the teaching and learning process. This notion exemplifies the instrumental nature of OBE, because it prescribes actions as a means of pursuing predetermined goals or aims.

The way of organising learning areas along the lines of stated outcomes can be regarded as a mechanism of social control, where learners are expected to adapt to the teaching environment. This renders the whole philosophy of learner-centeredness as irrelevant and conjures up images of instrumental action, as the classroom environment is already pre-arranged. The teaching environment should instead adapt to the social and economic realities of learners, and take cognisance of the diversity of the learners and adjust to embrace this diversity in order to make the learning experience more meaningful. This notion of predetermined outcomes has the potential to inhibit learners in that they only explore learning matter that has been prescribed or what the teacher wanted them to learn. In so doing they could be de-motivated from learning and hence gain little personal satisfaction from their progress. This approach to teaching and learning removes and distances both teachers and learners from the curriculum and would therefore seem to be a contradiction to principles of democracy and dignity. If a system does not allow for self-differentiation, with a high regard for self-identity through self-expression, then this system has the potential of undermining the dignity of people. Expecting all learners to respond in a similar way to knowledge lends itself to programmed learning and teaching, which is at the core of instrumentality. It also has the potential of immobilising identity, by denying it freedom of expression, which could seem to be undermining the importance of being (with reference to the subjective self). This notion of OBE further has the potential to undermine democratic practices, as there seems to be limited scope for active participation and decision making on the part of teachers and learners as to what outcomes are to be achieved. This could also be seen as an act of silencing the voices of teachers and learners and exerting power from the top down. This practice also contradicts notions of inclusivity and accessibility as spelled out in the curriculum policy. People stripped of the right to be active participants in matters that directly affect them and expected to respond to situations as though they are passive recipients can be regarded as subjected to forms of oppression, domination and control that dehumanises people – that is, to forms of instrumental action.

Learners act out these prescribed and predetermined outcomes and expectations without being active and creative participants, and teachers implement the

curriculum developed elsewhere and report on the conclusions thereof. These prescriptions have the potential to render learners passive in their own learning, as the learning has already happened elsewhere. It also has the danger of reducing the role of teachers to mere overseers and technicians of learning – another instance of instrumentality. Freire (1985: xiii) views this approach to teaching and learning as a form of power expressed through domination. This domination becomes visible in the way knowledge leads to social relations which have the tendency to silence both learners and teachers. Because of imposed prescriptions of policy in terms of the curriculum, teachers internalise this form of domination and they subconsciously perpetuate these power relations by subjecting learners to the same kind of prescriptions and constraints.

The RNCS places strong emphasis on the development of critical thinking skills as an imperative for social reconstruction. This implies that the schooling experience will engender critical thinking that will capacitate learners with the necessary skills to contribute to societal life in a meaningful way. I view critical thinking as a form of transcendental thinking in that it facilitates creative problem solving. It allows learners to think about societal problems in unconventional ways, thereby encouraging them to find creative ways to alter their social realities for the sake of a better and brighter future. The instrumental nature of OBE, because of its prescriptions, has the potential to hinder teachers and learners from becoming active participants in the construction and reconstruction of knowledge. Preventing the construction of knowledge is to deny teachers and learners free access to information, an act that impedes transformative goals and human rights. This instrumental action also prevents them from pursuing knowledge in a creative and meaningful way, thereby obstructing the development of democratic citizens who would take social action hopefully to improve society.

The policy takes for granted that teachers know how to act as mediators and facilitators of critical thinking. It also presupposes that teachers know how to make classrooms spaces conducive to critical thinking. Are learners encouraged to explore, ask questions, participate and articulate what meaning they have created and how is this construction of knowledge used to assess their progress

and development? When considering the instrumental nature of OBE, a scenario emerges of children responding to the teacher's expectations of what the intended outcomes should be.

I also see critical thinking as a means of addressing issues of power relations in the classroom as well as in broader society. The policy seems to remain silent on this reconfiguration of power relations in the classroom that impacts on teaching and learning. This has the potential of enabling teachers to continue with suppressive, disempowering forms of interaction in classrooms and could generate practices that sabotage the kind of values encapsulated in the policy.

Freire and Shor (1987: 185) state that "critical thinking needs imagination where students and teachers practice anticipating a new social reality. Imagination can be exercised as a resource to expel dominant ideology and open up some space in consciousness for transcendent thinking". This would necessitate learners and teachers reconstructing society by proposing new alternatives or solutions for societal problems. Although this notion of problem solving is utopian in nature, it does, however, have the potential to unleash the creative energies in learners to hope and dream of a different kind of future. This notion of problem solving would enable learners to look beyond the limitations placed on society by artificial class, regional, social, political and economic barriers. Current curriculum policy has the potential to restrict this kind of imaginative thinking in that it prescribes what is to be learned and what the outcome of that learning should be. This poses a problem to the challenge of imagining a kind of society where people can actively participate in its reconstruction or re-making. Freire and Shor's (1987: 8) main criticism against this kind of instrumentalism is that knowledge has already been produced in a space removed from both teachers and learners, thereby reducing the act of knowing the existing knowledge into a mere transference of the existing knowledge. This limits teachers to being specialists in the transference of knowledge, which strips them of their role of creating spaces for learners to be reflective, curious and inquiring respondents, which are necessary qualities for critical development. Critical development of learners is fundamental for educational transformation in that learners are not merely required to describe what they have learned, but also to understand and operationalise this in terms of

their own understanding of their realities. Freire and Shor (1987: 8) further state that if this kind of critical development is restricted and constrained, the production of knowledge and the knowing of existing knowledge are separated, thereby making schools agents for selling knowledge, which coincides with capitalist ideology. This dichotomising of new and existing knowledge sabotages the scope for critical capacity building and sets schools up as delivery systems responding to market needs, thereby entrapping and subjecting learners to an enslaving environment.

Critical thinking can be enhanced by the kind of content chosen for a curriculum and by engaging learners in significant academic work that would enable them to interact with knowledge constructs in a creative and reflective way. Cochran-Smith (in Hargreaves, 1998: 934) views significant academic work as emphasising rigorous subject matter, understanding as well as critique and consideration of alternative notions through collaborative work. The prescriptive nature of content and its outcomes in OBE would make it difficult for this kind of rigorous exploration and critique to take place and it also has the danger of discouraging teachers from exploring new ways of thinking and doing themselves. This raises the question of whether teachers are encouraged to teach skills which are alienating and assimilationist, thereby creating the notion that to succeed would be to escape from who you are and where you come from, and thereby not recognising identity, which is an imperative for active citizenship. This also undermines the principles of justice, liberty and dignity that are important pillars of transformation.

The RNCS refers to the empowerment of learners through a process of participation. My understanding of empowerment is that it allows people to take charge of their own lives by actively engaging in decision-making processes, and this would include choices of what and how they are to learn. Not creating spaces for learners to exercise these kinds of choices would be ignoring their diversity, and this can be regarded as a form of discrimination that is contrary to the values of democracy and human rights. Lauder and Wylie (1990: 139) posit that the instrumental action of prescribed outcomes would be in contradiction to the aims of educating for empowerment, as objectives are hierarchically

organised, which creates differential status in power and authority. This notion of hierarchical organisation entrenches the idea that the unequal exercise of power and authoritarian forms of decision making can be regarded as normal and natural in the sphere of teaching and learning, a notion that I shall further explore in Chapter Five of this thesis.

Time allocation specified in the Curriculum Policy Statement is another notion prevalent in instrumental action as it reinforces the idea of a timetable that distances teachers from learners. The danger is that it can lead only to focusing on classroom work in order to complete syllabi rather than to meaningful interaction between learners and teachers. This allocation per learning area hardly gives teachers enough time to familiarise themselves with the social realities of learners, which might impact negatively on their learning. This restricted time also has the potential of not allowing teachers sufficient time for meaningful feedback to learners about their learning and progress and to collaboratively revisit alternative teaching strategies to facilitate effective learning.

This brings me to the analyses of the Assessment Policy Framework and its components, which are overwhelmingly linked to instrumentality and which have the potential to defeat the purposes of developing a mass of critical citizens.

2.6 THE ASSESSMENT POLICY IN THE GET BAND, GRADES R TO 9

Any educational reform allows us to reflect on the essential purpose of teaching and learning. Because learning is intrinsically linked to assessment, this brings into question the whole aspect of what assessment is and its purpose. According to Le Grange and Beets (2005: 115), the purpose of assessment should be to gauge “how well learners are able to demonstrate what they have learned” and use this knowledge to inform learners about their progress. This action would determine whether assessment practices could be regarded as a “catalyst for change, emancipation and empowerment” (Le Grange & Beets, 2005: 118). This implies that during the assessment process learners are involved in making choices, setting up learning targets and that learning strategies are collaboratively negotiated so as to ensure that future teaching is directed at

advancing their interests. Assessment therefore seems to be one of the most potent tools to influence teaching and learning and there is no doubt that assessment can be “a force for good in classrooms particularly if it concentrates on supporting students’ learning on a day-to-day basis” (Broadfoot *et al.*, 1992: 1).

What the policy says about assessment will determine how teachers should be using their mandatory powers to engage the assessment task in the classroom to influence the progress of learners.

In the foreword to the policy mention is made of the expected levels of performance for each grade and phase in determining progression, which it regards as a landmark in education. It goes further to say that these levels of performance will be important yardsticks to identify learning difficulties. My problem with this statement is that it regards expected levels of performance as an important means to measure progress of learners. This implies that learners are subjected to a minimum requirement of knowing and understanding, and this poses the danger that learners who might venture out of the expected context might be stifled or regarded as digressing from the curriculum and wasting class time. This statement also presupposes that, if learners do not acquire or achieve these expected levels of performance, it will mean that they are experiencing difficulty with the work. It does not take cognisance of the fact that the predetermined standards are measurements against outcomes of work that might be totally irrelevant to the reality of learners, thereby not interesting them or completely alienating them from their own realities. This is an instrumental view of education that would impoverish learners’ learning and experiences.

The policy further states that the assessment result should be used to assist learners’ development and improve the process of learning and teaching. It does not mention any involvement of the learner during this process and it would appear as if the learner is treated as a subject, having to respond to the plans that teachers have put in place for them to develop. This alienates the learners from their own progress and learning, as if they are not aware of what their needs are. This instrumentalist notion treats learners like workers in the labour market

who have to produce so as to increase results (profits). This also contradicts the notion of OBE as a learner-centred approach, because to introduce a learner-centred approach does not mean only putting systems in place that policy dictates and that teachers think would benefit learners, but strategies that the learners themselves were part of. This would have a more empowering effect in that it would enable learners to claim ownership for their own learning and render the learning experience non-instrumentalist.

The fact that teachers are required to implement imposed assessment standards means that their professional freedom and autonomy are curtailed, making them mere technicians of control in order to ensure higher throughput rates – an action of instrumentality. Apple (1982: 147) refers to this as the proletarianisation of teachers as they are expected to control the end result of learning. This notion undermines principles of democracy and could have a harmful impact on teaching and learning.

The policy perpetually refers to skills, differing strategies and techniques, and appropriate tools to assess learners, which makes assessment a highly specialised and technical task. My difficulty with this is that the concern seems to be the improvement of tools for recording purposes, which makes the assessment process merely a technical instrument. It would seem that learners are required to develop skills that would enable them to function more effectively in the workplace – therefore, achievement for instrumental purposes. This is a form of instrumentality that could render the assessment process ineffective. It also has the potential to de-skill and remove the professional judgment from teachers, thereby rendering them inadequate, a factor that might in turn decrease their morale and confidence to engage in the assessment task in ways that could advance the interests of learners. This leaves one with the question of whether teachers are receiving sufficient scaffolding that would facilitate their re-skilling or are they engaged in designing disjointed tools for control purposes? This also raises a further question of whether teachers understand the impact of this new mandate that the assessment policy has bestowed upon them in order to engender the kind of citizen it envisages? If teachers do not understand the rationale behind the change, then the potential exists for the change to be

superficial. Teachers must not only be able to articulate the goals of the change, but they also need to understand the implications of this on practice. Therefore, teachers need to understand why they are doing what they are doing. This is imperative to sustain new practices in the light of a changing context. Fullan (2001: 45) posits that conceptual understanding facilitates the achievement of lasting reform and is fundamental to transformation.

Throughout the policy document amendments in assessment approaches are stated. Recommended assessment methods include providing opportunities for learners' diversifying needs to be taken into account, and using a variety of techniques and methods. The fact that the policy recognises that children do not develop at the same pace and would need differentiated teaching and assessment strategies poses a major challenge for teachers with possibly 40 to 50 learners (a conservative estimate, in many instances) in a classroom. A further challenge is to record all the learning outcomes for each learner in each of the eight learning areas, a task that takes up much of the teaching time and might impact on reporting to learners about their progress. While the ideal would be to individualise teaching and learning according to the learner's needs as well as supply learners with meaningful feedback, its practicability seems to need divine intervention.

Another difficulty is that changes in practice involving relationships in teaching and learning are not clarified and clear, and reference is made to democratic practices, but not how they should be operationalised by teachers. The reality is that teachers might engage with learners as before and use assessment primarily for purposes of recording and reporting to parents. This would impact on transparency to learners about how they have performed and exclude them from decisions on improving their performance – a notion that is grounded in instrumentalism.

The policy supports a criteria-referenced approach to assessment. This implies that criteria are set for each teaching, learning and assessment task that will specify the objectives of instruction and the specified assessment standards that learners are to attain. Assessment becomes a list of objectives that have been

attained to varying degrees, not taking cognisance of the fact that the measurement might have taken place without accommodating the diversity of children's learning and communication strengths. Therefore, the excellence or deficiency of a particular student's achievement in learning is judged in proportion to the prescribed objectives they have attained and not according to what they actually know about the subject. Popham and Hussek (1969: 178) concur with this notion when stating that assessing how well learners have performed is done by comparison with some predetermined criteria and this blinds teachers to how well learners have actually done by comparison with themselves and what they are capable of doing according to their own strengths. This seems to be an unjust system in that teachers reward learners (through codes) for what they know against specified criteria, instead of what progress they had made in terms of displaying greater understanding, showing development against their own capabilities. If learning exhibits itself in a change of behaviour and produces a change in capacity for performance, then we should observe changes in performance in order to infer that learning took place and not assess them according to how well learners have performed in relation to the expected criteria. Assessment against criteria is actually assessing a learner's capacity to perform certain tasks. This is an act of conditioning children at an early age to perform according to expectations. This evokes images of the labour market where workers have to perform according to expectations to meet productive targets.

This way of assessing learners against criteria focuses on control instead of on relevance, which exemplifies the instrumental nature of programmed instruction for programmed results. Emphasis on mastery of programmed instruction may cause some teachers to over-emphasise the mastery of simple knowledge and skills instead of encouraging the development of intellectual skills and abilities that go beyond the minimum essentials. This leaves the teacher with the challenge of how to make classroom assessment more relevant to what learners have learned through coming to know, without sacrificing the technical requirements of the policy. The result could also be misconstrued as the learner's inability to understand the work instead of the inability of the instructional strategy to enable learners to grasp concepts and constructs. If the result is to make an observable difference to the progress of learners, then what

they know and are able to do is surely more important than a mark allocated to them on the basis of expectations. In the light of these prescriptions, it would mean that the teacher would only be interested in the observable progress as it relates to the transference of knowledge instead of the creation of knowledge. Prescribed criteria do not enable teachers to determine what learners can actually do. What it does allow is for teachers to know whether they can achieve the expected outcomes. This leaves one with the question of whether the bureaucratic ideals of uniform criteria and outcomes are impersonal objectives that do not encourage learning – another feature of instrumentalism, as this kind of learning seems to favour routine-mindedness against original creative thinking.

The policy refers to different types of assessment, but does not mention the scope of informal assessment tasks, which are more numerous and less obvious. Informal assessment would occur when the teacher listens to a learner's questions or watches their body language to determine whether learners have understood the concept being taught. This would also include their ability to talk through a problem to find out why the learner gave a wrong answer before writing off the response as the learner's inability to comprehend. Reference is also made to continuous assessment of a learner's achievement. It would seem as though achievement refers to the learner's competence in various assessment tasks. My understanding of continuous assessment would be to gauge learner's affective and cognitive capacities as they engage with concepts and each other and how they are able to translate this into action. Therefore, it is not a matter of how good they are at responding to certain sections of work as separate entities, but the performance or ability of the learner to engage, reflect and analyse all issues pertaining to their life situations for the purpose of contributing to change and transformation (whether personal or societal).

The policy states that the purpose of assessment would be to maximise the learner's access to knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. How can this be achieved if the learner's progress is measured against predetermined and prescribed outcomes and standards, of which they were not part of designing and setting? How can learners develop attitudes and values that are aligned to principles of democracy, if they are not given the opportunity to exercise these

democratic practices? What transparency exists if learners are subjected to prescriptions that others have designed for them and imposed upon them and where the results of their achievement are not discussed with them timeously?

The policy prescribes codes (1-4) for different levels of achieving expected outcomes, and reporting to learners is often translated into these codes, which are not very helpful to learners in terms of what they need to do to develop and improve their understanding of concepts. Comprehensive comments about the actual performance of learners would be more illuminating rather than codes. Also learners receiving the same code might have tackled the task differently, therefore immediate feedback is necessary to highlight areas where learners have done well and those areas where support or a different approach is necessary. Rowntree (1977: 72) sees feedback on assessment as social relationships as learners open themselves to the opinions and judgment of others. An individual's right to privacy is waived as the assessment process grants the teacher the right to know and this right to know should be treated with respect and dignity. Therefore relaying the assessment result is a process that must be treated with the necessary confidentiality. Learners expose themselves because of the need to improve and develop themselves. Therefore illuminating feedback as opposed to prescribing becomes an imperative for teaching and learning. The allocation of codes (1-4) to learners according to their perceived performance in particular tasks depends solely on the teacher's interpretation. This tends to strain teacher and learner relations and makes teachers see learners as "abstracts and self-constructed entities" (Livingstone, 1987: 252) that leaves assessment open to subjective judgments, on fortuitous observations and on unverified inferences.

Learning programmes are regarded as the basis of assessment. Learning programmes outline the content that needs to be covered and the implication is that the teacher needs to work through these programmes during specific time frames. If assessment is a tool to identify and explain the affect and effectiveness of the teaching, it would mean that teachers might not cover the work as specified by the curriculum during specified time frames, as they would

need to revisit certain concepts regularly in order accommodate all the learners' conceptual understanding.

When looking at the assessment standards that inform the assessment process, the development and enhancement of critical inquiry and analyses, evaluation, suggestion of appropriate action or solutions and demonstrating knowledge and understanding seem to be at the core of the assessment expectation. Macedo (in Freire & Macedo, 1985: 2) translates Freire's thoughts on critical inquiry, which involves trying to appropriate the deeper meaning of texts through investigation of the content under study and the context. He purports that it requires an attitude of inward questioning through which we come to understand the reason behind the facts. Keeping in mind the above perspective on critical inquiry, the assessment standards set out in the RNCS for different learning areas would seem to revolutionise the teaching, learning and assessment process. However, if teachers do not understand the full scope of the practices it requires from them, then these intentions have the potential to be reduced to mere buzzwords. The teacher may purport to be teaching children to analyse source material critically, but their practices and the assessment methods they devise may merely train learners to prose comprehension. This could lead to a conflict between intention and actuality. The policy takes for granted that teachers possess the skills to lead learners to the intended assessment goals. These aims are broad statements that are open to interpretation, as two teachers might disagree as to what constitutes being critical and how it should be assessed. These aims are open for teachers to interpret and construe, and they might modify them in the process of trying to make sense and translating them into the actions, relationships and behaviour that they consider as apt. The policy states that teachers need to clarify expected criteria and outcomes to learners, which leaves little scope for learners to interact dynamically with these outcomes and engage with them in a critical manner. The expectation has already been transferred to them and they are expected to accept these uncritically and respond to them in a programmed way, with no provision made for diversity. Therefore the possibility that learners actually control and direct tasks according to their own understanding and interpretation is very slim – a process that seemingly stunts creative and critical thinking.

The policy talks about partnerships between educators, learners and parents without taking cognisance of the power and social realities of families that hamper effective steps to assist learners in improving their development. Remediation for learning problems to facilitate learner progress is very important and yet the reality is that resources are not sufficient to ensure that effective remediation takes place at schools. Remediation therefore becomes a burden to teachers who need to do this after school, after a full teaching and learning programme. How effective could this remediation be in the light of it having to take place after school, when learners are tired and saturated?

Time-tabling as proposed in the curriculum has a profound impact on assessment in that it traps teachers in a time-vortex that might obstruct them in giving sufficient thought to the effects of the assessment result on teaching and learning. It also affects the timeous communication of the result that could impact on its meaningfulness for the learner. Rather than a continuous process, assessment is often a set of disconnected parts. If we lose sight of this process, the potential exists that learners are left to their own devices, while teachers continue with the curriculum and learners might only receive occasional discrete spurts of assistance. This could render assessment extraneous to the main purpose of teaching. This approach has the potential of enhancing the power of teachers over learners, as the assessment result would entail making disjointed and subjective decisions about learners' progress without consulting them or using the result to improve their proficiency. This also has the potential to result in hidden assumptions and partial truths about what learners' progress is. This could deny the learner the opportunity to interact with the assessment result in order to find out more about themselves. To deny learners the right to re-set goals for future learning would be to deny them access to their own learning, a notion that would contravene every aspect of their humanity and dignity.

Timetabling constraints could impact on issues of objectivity, validity and fairness. This alienation from decision-making processes regarding their own learning would be an act of instrumentalism that could work against the intention of promoting democratic citizenship. Rowntree (1977: 24) posits that feedback or

knowledge of results is the lifeblood of learning, as learners want to know whether they have effectively communicated what they intended to communicate. They would need a fairly rapid response if the assessment result were to confirm or modify their present understanding or approach. Effective and timely feedback would enable learners to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and enable them to direct their learning in ways that might improve their understanding of the learning experience. If the assessment result is not timely provided to learners, it loses its effectiveness as a tool to modify or remediate aspects of learning difficulties. Just as assessment provides learners with feedback of how well they have learned, so too it supplies teachers with feedback on how well they have taught, and the result could be used to modify or change future strategies for future teaching. The teacher would also be able, through the assessment result, to identify where they have failed to explain concepts clearly or given insufficient practice to learners to consolidate their learning.

2.7 CONCLUSION

On the surface the assessment policy seems to be transformatory as it propagates values of respect, democracy, justice, participation, equality and equity. It also promotes ideas of critical thinking, inquiry and problem solving that could possibly engender critical citizens who through their actions can begin to transform society. My contention is that the prescriptive nature of assessment in OBE is an instrumental approach to education that prevents learners from effectively engaging in rational, imaginative and reflective activity. It not only constricts learners to being passive subordinates, but it also clouds their imagination, their capacity to reason rationally and their potential to design meaningful new alternatives for transforming their realities. This instrumental notion of education prevents both teachers and learners from pursuing knowledge in a creative and meaningful way, which leaves the learning and teaching experience impoverished and counter-productive in terms of its goal of engendering critical citizens.

CHAPTER 3

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I shall record, interpret and analyse the feelings and views of 7 teachers, in the intermediate and senior phase, about assessment in OBE. An initial sample of 60% agreed to participate in this process but 2 educators withdrew because of certain dispositions unknown to me. I decided to use a semi-structured approach to interviews. Questions were not given to teachers before the interview, as I wanted to elicit their gut responses and feelings, which would allow opinions, feelings and perspectives to emerge freely. Interviews consisted of 11 questions that were posed to teachers to ascertain how they experience assessment not only in their classrooms, but also in the school. Teachers who were selected included the HoDs (heads of departments) of most grades and the curriculum and assessment coordinators of the school, because I felt that they could influence the way that assessment is practised not only in particular grades, but also in the school. Other teachers included post level 1 and senior teachers.

These interviews were conducted after school in the classrooms of teachers, which gave me a sense of how children were seated in those classrooms, as this could have an impact on how they experience teaching and learning as well as how they are allowed to interact with each other. This was a very frustrating and drawn-out exercise as teachers were only available for one hour after school. Most interviews were conducted over two days as teachers had the need to share what they were experiencing. They accommodated me despite the other duties they had, which involved preparation of work for the following day, marking and recording of assessment tasks, marking of books and assignments, and meetings. There also seemed to be the underlying tension that they were divulging too much and that they were perhaps not loyal, but being a teacher myself, experiencing the same realities in the classroom as they did, somehow alleviated this tension. The process was further drawn out by teacher's administrative responsibilities pertaining to assessment at the end of the term.

I interviewed individual teachers at a time, as I wanted to elicit as many individual responses as possible in an attempt to gauge the feelings and impressions of teachers about the teaching and learning experience. Because of the small sample used for my research I included the questions posed to interviewees in this chapter, instead of including it in an appendix at the end of my thesis.

3.2 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Teachers had to share their feelings and views and talk about the following questions:

3.2.1 Could you share some of your views and feelings about assessment in OBE?

3.2.2 Can assessment, the way in which it is practised, be used as a developmental tool or is it predominantly a tool for recording the progress of learners in various activities?

3.2.3 How do the time frames for the completion of the curriculum impact on teaching and learning in the classroom?

3.2.4 In the light of class size and the realities around the timetable, how and when do you provide each learner with feedback about their performance after each assessment task?

3.2.5 Values inform our Constitution and at the same time underpin education in its attempt to bring about a democratic society. How would you incorporate these values in the teaching and learning experience and how is it assessed?

3.2.6 How do the prescribed outcomes and assessment standards influence what you do in the classroom with learners?

3.2.7 Could you briefly explain how you accommodate the learner's contexts into your curriculum and assessment practice?

3.2.8 The National Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement emphasises the fact that the purpose of education is to engender critical citizens. How do current assessment practices influence this goal?

3.2.9 How is the voice of teachers at school accommodated when deciding upon curriculum or assessment practices?

3.2.10 What kind of training have teachers received to assist them with the assessment task? (I am asking this question because assessment in OBE has changed).

3.2.11 What changes or practices would you suggest or recommend for future curriculum and assessment implementation at school?

3.3 RESPONSES OF TEACHERS

3.3.1 QUESTION 1:

TEACHER 1 felt that assessment in OBE afforded learners many opportunities to master tasks, especially the weaker learner. This, however, involved more work on the part of the teachers, as they have to assess and record all these extra opportunities given to learners. The teacher doubted whether more opportunities actually improved the skills and insights of learners, or if they just became better at responding to certain prescribed tasks because of repeated opportunities. The teacher's view was that learners are too young to understand what peer and group work entails. Teachers need to get through the curriculum so as to prepare learners for assessment and cannot spend sufficient time on coaching learners in peer and group work.

TEACHER 2 felt that the prescribed learning outcomes and assessment standards detract from the teaching and learning experience, as teachers are more focused on getting through them. What is good, though, are the many opportunities this affords learners at succeeding at a task, although the task had

to be the same so as not to disadvantage other learners, who are not given a second chance. This involves a lot of work, especially in the light that this form of assessment is something new and that teachers perhaps do not have a common understanding of how to grapple effectively with assessment tasks.

TEACHER 3 stated that teachers did not have a common understanding of what continuous assessment involves. The feeling is that learners should be assessed for recording purposes on a continuous basis with guidance throughout the term so as to achieve the stated outcomes and assessment standards. Taking into consideration that teachers have to teach 7 to 8 learning areas with all their assessment standards, they are pressurised to rush through the work with insufficient time to 'coach' children. Learners are not given the opportunity to experience, and explore in order to deepen their understanding of concepts or ideas. Because learners become familiar with the way in which they are assessed, they become good at responding the way that teachers expect them to. This in many cases does not give a true reflection of the actual capabilities of learners. The assessment task reveals that the learners respond successfully to the given task. Group work in many instances does not work because learners see it as an opportunity to socialise with their peers. The weaker learner also gets lost in this process.

TEACHER 4 felt that it would be beneficial if teachers had the time to provide immediate feedback to learners after an assessment task, but this becomes an insurmountable task in the light of getting through the curriculum of many learning areas. The whole aspect of integration of learning areas is a new concept and perhaps teachers do not have enough guidance as to what it actually involves or entails. Learners are not familiar with the concept of peer assessment and tend to be subjective. Because they know that it does not contribute to their term mark, they do not treat it seriously or do not provide effective feedback to peers, which makes the whole exercise a time-consuming one. It is easy for learners to get lost in the system as teachers are pressurised to get through the curriculum and prepare them for the next assessment tasks. Because of this, not enough time is spent to consolidate work.

TEACHER 5 views assessment in OBE as a transparent process as learners are told before the assessment exercise how and what they are to be assessed on. The idea of providing immediate feedback would also assist learners in improving their performance, but this notion becomes impossible to implement in the light of the many learning areas teachers have to cover. Because of the assessment standards teachers have to get through, the tendency is to focus on quantity instead of quality, on content instead of skills.

TEACHER 6 felt that a new system of education was necessary in this country. However, OBE was introduced with a lot of uncertainty, no clear guidelines and inadequate training for implementation was provided to teachers. Teachers were not sufficiently trained to deal with the assessment task as outlined by OBE. The codes are not a clear guideline of the learner's ability or competency in various skills and no guidance was provided of how to assess values in the critical outcomes.

TEACHER 7: The view of this teacher was that assessment in OBE is often laced with uncertainty and misunderstanding. Assessment is seen as a natural progression from dealing with a body of knowledge and finding different ways of ascertaining whether goals and outcomes have been achieved. The feeling was also that a new form of assessment was necessary to enable learners to express themselves with greater clarity and confidence. However, learners find the demands of assessment in 8 learning areas a daunting task and too challenging to cope with.

3.3.2 QUESTION 2:

TEACHER 1: The feeling was that the paper work is too much and teachers seem to concentrate more on recording the learner's mark and getting on with the syllabus, instead of providing each learner with effective feedback about their performance after each assessment task. Teachers also tend to be more concerned with the success of the learner in specific tasks, instead of how they are able to apply their knowledge in different situations. The ideal would be to supply feedback after each assessment task, but in the light of so many learning

areas and assessment standards to cover, this becomes impossible. It is difficult to remediate during class time, as there are so many learners to monitor, each having different needs for progression. The teacher questioned the effectiveness of remediation after school as both learners and teachers are tired and thirty minutes per week is just not adequate. The result is that children progress with gaps in their learning throughout their school careers.

TEACHER 2: This teacher felt that the Department expects teachers to record learners' progress and that this seems to be the focus. The learner is given the information about their result in assessment tasks, but it becomes very difficult to discuss performance with them, because of the work that still needs to be covered in all the other learning areas. Remediation after school is not effective as it is only for 30 minutes and teachers cannot work with more than 4 children at a time in order for the remediation to be effective. Children are also usually tired after school and they seem to be less focused.

TEACHER 3: The view of this teacher was that there is not enough time for consolidation work or for remediation during class time. It is very difficult working with different capability groups, each with their own needs, as teachers need to cover the curriculum and assessment standards in all learning areas. Integration of learning areas is still an area that needs attention as subjects are still dealt with as separate entities and this just adds to the administrative task. In this light, assessment becomes primarily a tool for recording a learner's performance in certain tasks. Learners also tend to prepare themselves for only the assessment task and the teacher questioned whether their learning actually had a lasting and meaningful impact on their progress and understanding, and how they apply knowledge to different situations. Too many learners are progressing with gaps in their learning, as it is very easy to master assessment tasks as children become good at doing what they are expected to.

TEACHER 4: Learners are at different levels of understanding and work at different paces. Assessment is done at one level irrespective of whether all learners are ready to engage in the assessment task. The recording of the assessment result has preference, as this needs to be done to meet school and

departmental targets. Because of 7 to 8 learning areas to cover, it becomes difficult to supply learners with feedback after each and every task. Feedback is primarily about their achievement in a task and not focused on what learners need to do to improve their competency levels. Teachers have also not received sufficient training in teaching at different levels in one class, let alone assess on different levels at the same time. Remediation is also very difficult in view of not enough time available during the formal school day and after school is limited to 4 to 6 six learners. Learners who are not very weak but who still need remediation miss out on this opportunity and progress without having an in-depth understanding of concepts. The whole issue of integration is contentious as teachers are not familiar with all content and this results in almost all learning areas being taught and assessed separately.

TEACHER 5: The teacher felt that the focus seems to be too much on assessment without children grasping concepts thoroughly or being able to link them to other areas of work or ascertain how they impact on their lives. Assessment is still very much an individual task done by the teacher, which does not cater for children with different learning styles or ways of communication. Although learners are given different types of assessment at different intervals, they are all assessed according to the same method at one given time, as the feeling is that this ensures uniformity in expected quality.

TEACHER 6: At present assessment is being used more as a tool for recording. If the school aims to make assessment developmental, then teachers would need to use assessment to measure the learner's progression of understanding, the ability to interact with concepts and how they are able to operationalise the skills they have developed.

TEACHER 7: While assessment should be a developmental tool for learners, the reality is that assessment is done to attach a mark to a learner's level of achievement and performance. This is clear when determining the quality of work done by learners and the general attitude of teachers towards the assessment task. Assessment is not often thought through well enough.

3.3.3 QUESTION 3:

TEACHER 1: The view of this teacher was that the assessment standards for the different learning areas are just too much. Teachers also have to cover certain work in the curriculum at specified times in order to prepare learners for assessment. The result is that not very much consolidation work takes place and learners are required to give only the bare minimum. They therefore do not have thorough knowledge about certain concepts, as the class work needs to continue to meet completion target dates. Work is written off, whether all learners understand concepts or not. The feeling was that there was insufficient time to repeat certain sections of the work.

TEACHER 2: This teacher felt that teachers get through the curriculum in time. There is, however, very little time for consolidation work as learners are all not at the same level. The feeling was that learners would have another opportunity to revisit the specific outcome at a different section of the work.

TEACHER 3: The opinion expressed by this teacher was that there is not enough time to re-visit sections of the work in order to consolidate concepts. It is important to get through the work so as to assess for record purpose. The whole issue of re-testing learners' understanding of the work is also difficult, as the curriculum needs to be covered at a specific date. This teacher questioned how meaningful the learning experience was for learners as they have limited time to concretise concepts. They are also not given enough time to meaningfully grapple with work given.

TEACHER 4: Because teachers need to work through a curriculum at specified times, learners do not have sufficient time to reflect, self-evaluate and discuss class work. The teacher does not have enough time to do consolidation work and learners are drilled to get through assessment activities.

TEACHER 5: The quality of what teachers do in the classroom is affected by the curriculum and assessment standards in each learning area that needs to be covered. If less pressure is placed on teachers to formally assess learners,

which involves a document with a school badge on it, then perhaps teachers could concentrate on ensuring that learners are able to effectively concretise their understanding of concepts and how they impact on their lives.

TEACHER 6: If teachers prepare and manage their time well, rushing through the curriculum would be unnecessary. Teachers should not be dictated to or intimidated by timeframes. Each school should work according to their needs and work from the position of the learners.

TEACHER 7: The teacher felt that it had a negative impact on both learners and teachers at times. The feeling was that teachers are forced to move too quickly through concepts in order to complete the work schedules of 8 learning areas. This, however, should not be used as an excuse not to revisit concepts, which is critical to facilitate greater understanding and insight on the part of learners.

3.3.4 QUESTION 4:

TEACHER 1: The teacher felt that the specified time allocated for each learning area made it difficult at times for meaningful teaching, learning, consolidation and meaningful feedback to learners to take place. Class teaching, where the teacher was responsible for the teaching of most learning areas, alleviated this problem to a certain extent as it enabled teachers to complete a fair amount of work in a session, which was two to three hours. Meaningful feedback to learners about their performance after each assessment task becomes difficult in the light of class sizes (39 to 42 learners). The feeling was that integration might solve this problem, but it would mean that teachers develop a common understanding of how to go about facilitating an integrated teaching and learning approach.

TEACHER 2: The view of this teacher was that class sizes, with learners at different levels of understanding and background knowledge, make it difficult for teachers to meet each individual child's needs. Disruptions because of other teachers being responsible for certain subjects interrupts teaching and learning at times, and make it difficult for some learners to continue where they left off. It

also becomes time consuming as the teacher needs to re-cap work done before continuing with the lesson that was interrupted. Feedback to learners affects teaching time and the fact that they have to go to other classes impacts on the process of providing feedback to learners timeously.

TEACHER 3: This teacher was of the opinion that OBE will prove to be more successful if class sizes were reduced, as this would afford the teacher the time to remediate in the class so as to cater for each child's needs. Smaller classes would also allow learners to engage more with each other in a meaningful way, allowing more time for discussion, report-back and feedback. The teacher felt that the allocation of time to learning areas placed the teacher under undue pressure, which impacts on the quality of work done by the teacher and learners. The teacher felt that magical powers were needed to provide meaningful feedback to each and every learner about their progress in each and every learning area, taking into account the sizes of classes. Feedback involved giving learners back their assessment results with written comments.

TEACHER 4: This teacher felt that it was not effective to do OBE with such big classes. It is difficult to work at different levels at the same time, the result being that some learners get lost in the system. The allocated time per learning area affects the quality of teaching and learning and prevents enough discussion and expression of opinions. Further disruptions are caused when the teacher needs to leave one class to teach in other classes. The learning and teaching experience is disrupted and the teacher needs to re-introduce the concept during a next period. The weaker learner finds it difficult to cope with this situation. The result is that some learners are lost in the system. Because of the timetable, timeous feedback was not always possible and individual feedback takes up teaching time. Many times feedback consisted only of giving them back their test results with written comments.

TEACHER 5: The view of this teacher was that timetabling allowed teachers to work through the curriculum. The problem experienced was, however, that it did cause a disruption in teaching and learning because, just as learners got down to really discussing and analysing work, they had to stop and change a period. This

to large degree influenced continuity and adversely affected some learners especially those experiencing problems with comprehension. To a large degree feedback was returning assessment tasks to learners with written comments.

TEACHER 6: Feedback can only be realistically given to learners one week after the assessment experience. This was usually in the form of written comments on the assessment scripts and oral feedback provided to only a few learners. The ideal would be to provide verbal feedback to all learners so as to scaffold their further learning, but in the light of class size and time constraints, it becomes a difficult task and an area that needs to be worked on.

TEACHER 7: Depending on the difficulties experienced, the teacher would address the class in general and also ask learners to discuss the remarks, usually written on the assessment task after marking it. The feeling was that it was not often possible to adequately provide feedback to learners after each assessment task because of class size and the number of assessment pieces per learning area, which amounts to 25 – 30 assessments per term.

3.3.5 QUESTION 5:

TEACHER 1: Not much emphasis was placed on values during the teaching and learning experience. Learners were reminded of basic values such as respecting each other's opinions and conduct at school towards teachers and peers. Teachers have different values and different belief systems and there was not one common understanding of values in teaching and learning incorporated in the curriculum. There is also no consistency amongst teachers in imparting certain values.

TEACHER 2: This teacher felt getting through the curriculum was more important than spending time on values. Learners were, however, reminded of the importance of respect, discipline and giving others a chance to express their opinions. Teachers also tick a section on report cards pertaining to values at the end of the term.

TEACHER 3: The educator felt that not much emphasis was placed on values in classrooms, apart from the normal discussions pertaining to discipline. Teachers also do not adhere to common values or have a common understanding of how values need to be incorporated in the classroom. Teachers need to lead by example and through their actions and attitudes towards learners, practice certain values everyday.

TEACHER 4: This teacher found that values were not easy to assess. Although learners' attitudes toward each other were monitored and they were reminded of appropriate conduct, learners were not given enough opportunities to practice these values in their day-to-day interaction with the curriculum and others. The teacher found it more effective to teach values in group-work sessions where learners had to engage with each other as a unit instead of individuals. While values were not formally tested, the teacher's impression of learners' conduct and attitude was ticked on their report card at the end of each term.

TEACHER 5: The feeling was that teachers were not consistent and do not have a common understanding of how to incorporate the teaching of values in the curriculum. It was easier to make learners aware of values when working in groups, although it was felt that learners were too young to debate issues with each other and that group work in many instances ended up being a social experience and all learners do not participate in groups. Teachers express their impressions of learners on the report card to parents at the end of each term.

TEACHER 6: This teacher felt that it was very difficult to assess values and that religious education and life skills programmes would better equip learners with the teaching and learning of values. For it to be effective, the transference and teaching of values should be a school-wide practice. Since values cannot be tested, the practices of learners should be continuously observed and on-the-spot feedback provided to learners about the values espoused by our Constitution.

TEACHER 7: This teacher's view was that values are not separate to the teaching and learning experience and that many values could be incorporated

during the daily interaction with learners, especially in the light of spending most of the school day with them. Values fostered in classrooms included taking pride in whatever they are involved in, politeness, neatness and compassion. Because values are incorporated in the outcomes of learning areas, it becomes important to think about values when selecting material. Group work helps to foster certain values, as learners often learn more easily from their peers.

3.3.6 QUESTION 6:

Most teachers felt that they covered this aspect in question 1, but added that the focus was too much on the achievement of outcomes instead on how the learner responds to concepts holistically. The feeling was that the outcomes could still be achieved without specifying them, as this would encourage learners to approach work differently. Learners and teachers tend to focus only on the outcomes for that specific task and this is not followed throughout the curriculum on a daily basis, as learners interact with work and with each other. Teachers also felt that too much emphasis was placed on outcomes instead of skills development, skills which they could apply every day in the learning experience. The feeling was that outcomes diluted the quality of education, as learners learn to master the outcomes, directed at specific tasks, too easily. Some teachers felt that the outcomes were an excellent tool that guided teaching and learning, and they were regularly used by educators to moderate question papers.

3.3.7 QUESTION 7:

The views of teachers were that the curriculum treats all children as if they were the same, having the same background knowledge and exposure. All learners are expected to respond the same to criteria and their own realities are seldom accommodated in the teaching and learning experience. It was only when doing certain projects that the realities of learners were accommodated to a certain extent. The attitude was that learners need to adapt to the school culture, how and what was taught. One teacher mentioned that some concepts were too abstract and that it made no sense to learners in terms of their realities. Some learners also did not feel free to expose their realities because of stigmatisation.

Children do not respect each other and the circumstances of others. One teacher mentioned that discipline problems were experienced because learners maybe felt that they were involved in irrelevant learning. Some teachers were of the view that issues happening in the local environment are discussed with learners and in that way the contexts of learners are accommodated in the curriculum. The feeling was further that teachers should take cognisance of learner's backgrounds and display greater sensitivity when interacting with them. In selecting curriculum material the realities of learners should be considered, especially because of their diversity. Greater informal discussions with parents would assist in really getting to know learners and this was regarded as very important in trying to gain insight into and understanding of why learners respond to the teaching and learning experience the way they do.

3.3.8 QUESTION 8:

TEACHER 1: This teacher's view was that, although the assessment standards stipulate that learners need to be critical when engaged in activity, perhaps teachers do not quite understand the important impact of this on children's learning. Teachers have never as a unit discussed what critical action involves and how teachers can use this as a tool for teaching and learning. Learners being assertive was also regarded as evidence that learners are becoming more critical.

TEACHER 2: It was felt that the amount of content and assessment standards that teachers need to get through for each learning area is too much. The focus is on learners to know content for assessment purposes and that debate and discussion takes up too much time. The teacher was of the opinion that children are asked to be critical when doing certain activities.

TEACHER 3: Because the teacher needs to get through the syllabus of 7 to 8 learning areas, little emphasis is placed on time for reflection and discussion in the classroom. When learners discuss work with each other, they become very rowdy and it was felt that they achieve more working as individuals. The learner's response to questions posed by the teachers was seen as an indication

of how critical they are. The teacher felt that understanding concepts and the ability to perform tasks were an indication of the learner's critical capacities.

TEACHER 4: Learners are expected to know content for assessment purposes. Very little emphasis is placed on critical interaction. The main concern is whether they understand the work that they are given so as to move on to the next level of work. Learners are not very outspoken and are not willing to express their views freely out of fear that they might say the wrong things or supply answers that were not as expected. The teacher's view was also that teachers themselves do not have a common understanding of what critical activity involves. What the teacher expressed, though, is that critical engagement should be a way of teaching and learning and should happen on a continuous basis and not just at certain times. The teacher further felt that teachers could focus on exposing learners to concepts and how to operationalise them, if less emphasis was perhaps placed on a curriculum and content.

TEACHER 5: One teacher felt that educators needed to get out of the box and continuously engage learners in activities that assist them in developing their critical capacities. Teachers are too concerned with the noise levels in their classrooms and do not allow learners enough time and opportunities to debate and discuss work with each other or become involved in constructive co-operative activity. As such, learners do not get accustomed to collectively grappling with issues, and class work still predominantly remains individual work. The teacher felt that maybe it is taken for granted that teachers know what it involves to be engaged in critical activity and feels that this is an area that is neglected. Of greater concern was that learners understand the content they are given and are able to express this in assessment tasks. The focus also seems to be on quantity instead of quality and the teacher felt that less content could be done more comprehensively, which afford learners with opportunities to really discuss issues with each other and relate them to their life situations.

TEACHER 6: This teacher was of the opinion that assessment to a large degree was still aimed at testing learner's knowledge or how well they remember facts. Little emphasis is placed on testing skills to gauge practice or an approach when

learners interact with knowledge constructs. The feeling was that all assessment tasks should be directed at testing the learner's ability to critically engage with content and perhaps effective guidance should be given to teachers to ensure that assessments are aimed at testing and developing the critical capacity of learners, otherwise teachers would not achieve the objective of education, which is to assist in developing critical citizens.

TEACHER 7: Because thinking and reasoning are part of the learning area outcomes, teachers need to provide multiple opportunities for learners to discuss, interpret and reason critically. This goal of getting learners to engage critically with a body of knowledge as well as with each other distinguishes OBE from the old education system and teachers could assist, in an attempt to engender critical citizens, by ensuring that learners achieve these outcomes.

3.3.9 QUESTION 9:

Some teachers felt that, although issues pertaining to the curriculum were discussed with them, it was more a matter of telling them what was expected of them and how and when they were to do it. Teachers did not spend enough time really discussing issues that affected teaching and learning, and that it was more a matter of following specified guidelines of the EMDC (Education Management and Development Centre – old districts) and the Department. Teachers felt that they did not have time to discuss strategies for teaching and learning with each other and that they, to a large degree, worked as individuals in a specific grade. Teachers were also of the opinion that no opportunities were created for schools to share with others those strategies for teaching and learning that might be successful at their schools. The further concern was that, even if schools had models that were successful, no provision was made for this to be filtered through to the powers that be so as to affect future implementation or adaptation to policy. Some teachers felt that regular meetings were held to discuss assessment and curriculum decisions and that the revised assessment and curriculum guidelines were much easier to follow in terms of what it is that teachers need to do.

3.3.10 QUESTION 10:

Teachers only attended workshops during one school holiday, which revolved around the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS) in preparation for its implementation. They left these workshops with no common understanding of what continuous assessment, critical teaching and learning and an integrated approach to teaching and learning meant, to mention only a few of the numerous concerns around competency to implement an OBE approach. Teachers further felt that as a school they do not deliberate about these issues enough. Although there were also attempts to train teachers by means of assessment courses, Cape Teaching Institute (CTI) courses in Literacy, Numeracy and Natural Science, this was not adequate. No follow-up and support sessions were provided to gauge effectiveness in the field.

3.3.11 QUESTION 11:

Teachers suggested that an integrated approach to teaching and learning across all learning areas is an area that needs to be developed, in order to assist teachers and learners to engage with knowledge and understanding of concepts in a holistic manner. They mentioned that written guidelines was not good enough, but that teachers needed more training that would address the practical implementation of this notion. They also need to treat informal assessment as an important component in determining the ability of learners to interact with concepts and to gauge their development and progress, as too much emphasis is placed on assessment for recording purposes. More support from the EMDCs, sharing amongst schools and ongoing training were also seen as priority areas in order to better equip teachers for the assessment task. Some teachers were of the opinion that the school needed to carefully scrutinise content in order to accommodate the realities of learners or continuously link content to the context of learners. Some teachers also felt that teachers at school level need to discuss issues around the curriculum, teaching and learning strategies, assessment and training of teachers more often, so as to promote the development of critical inquiry in classrooms and satisfy the differentiated needs of learners. More computer programmes were

also needed to consolidate class work and to assist learners with research projects. The feelings of some teachers were that the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements needed to be studied in greater depth by the school, followed by discussion that would facilitate greater understanding of concepts such as continuous assessment, critical action, values, etc. They also felt that teachers should share their experiences in terms of teaching and learning strategies, remediation, discipline and the skill or strategy to teach and assess learners at different levels of understanding and development in one class. Teachers also felt that perhaps there should be general principles to guide the teaching and learning experience, because the many assessment standards in each learning area constrained effective and meaningful teaching and learning.

3.4 ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' RESPONSES

When looking at the responses of teachers I am reminded of the challenges I raised in Chapter 1 and the problem statement of this thesis. These challenges include concerns around the re-organisation of knowledge not only to alter the teaching and learning cultures in schools, but also to promote change that would begin to foster the values embraced in our Constitution, in order to facilitate effective and meaningful change of attitude and practice in classrooms. My impressions when interviewing the teachers were that different practices and interpretations of policy (not necessarily a fault of their own) not only affected what they do with learners in classrooms, but also impacts on the transformative goal of education, that of engendering critical citizens.

Through the interviews I got the sense that what teachers do in classrooms is prescribed to them by policy as text to a large degree. It would appear that teachers are not given adequate opportunity to develop their own framework for teaching and learning, as these are dictated to them by the Education Management Development Centres (EMDCs), learning area outcomes and assessment standards. Teachers are also not exposed to adequate and effective opportunities for critical deliberation so as to develop a common understanding of aspects of their work and the mandate placed on them by the curriculum and

assessment policies. This top-down approach contradicts notions of critical action and removes teachers and learners from active participation in the construction of new forms of knowledge and imaginative ways of doing, which not only constrains democratic practice in classrooms but also restricts the development of critical thinking and impoverishes effective and meaningful teaching and learning. This scenario forced me to consider the implication of Elliot's (1998: xiii) view that teachers need to shape their thinking, attitudes and practices. This can only be done through reflective deliberation and critical engagement, if education is to have a transformative impact in classrooms and on the lives of children. Teachers need to engage in processes of critical action that would enable them to participate co-operatively and actively in designing goals for teaching and learning, thereby fostering a greater understanding of the dialogical relationship in the teaching and learning experience. By actively designing goals for teaching and learning, teachers can begin to re-shape the teaching and learning experiences in classrooms towards fostering a more democratic culture, which provides learners with opportunities for joint activity and collective decision-making.

Teachers felt the need to talk about and discuss issues affecting teaching and learning in classrooms and it was clear from their responses that they were grappling with issues that involved effective integration, remediation, teaching and assessing at different levels and providing adequate, timeous feedback to each learner after every assessment task. These concerns of teachers emphasise the need for critical action that would encourage critical reflection, rational discussion and (dis)consensus in order to solve the practical challenges that teachers are confronted with in classrooms on a daily basis.

When looking at the demands (as expressed by teachers) that current assessment requirements place on teachers, it would seem as though assessment is used primarily as a tool to record the learners' level of progress against prescribed criteria and outcomes at a certain juncture in the curriculum. It would also appear as though the purpose of assessment is to gauge how well learners have mastered content that is measured against a set of prescribed criteria. This emphasises the instrumental nature of outcomes and assessment

standards, which focus primarily on prescriptions, which in turn has the potential to undermine critical action. This instrumental approach to learning is detached from notions of critical action that views learning as an ongoing encounter with one's own perceptions and those of others, a continuous experience in the quest to improve the capacities of learners to better understand themselves and others.

Teachers expressed the view that they find it difficult to work at the pace of learners, because of the curriculum and assessment standards they need to cover within certain timeframes. The allocation of time to learning areas results in the compartmentalisation of the many assessment standards of the various learning areas. This practice makes it difficult for concepts and knowledge to be dealt with in a holistic and integrated way. Teaching and learning are therefore not experienced as a consolidated integration of concepts, but as separate entities in different pockets at different times. The mastery of predetermined outcomes according to stipulated time frames has the potential to limit the scope of learners to engage in deliberate, rational reflection in order to develop their capacities of critical reasoning and judgment. Processes of critical action become an imperative for classroom practice, as this has the potential of opening up possibilities for ongoing dialogue and afford learners with opportunities of freedom to act, without sacrificing this freedom in defence of minimum standards and objectives.

Realities around administrative overload, class size and time-tabling affects meaningful growth and in-depth understanding of learners to take place, as effective feedback about their performance with an effective programme of action cannot be given to them on a continuous and regular basis. Teachers feel concerned that this leaves learners with a kind of paralysis and inability to deal with the many challenges they face during their learning experience, which results in many of them progressing with gaps in their learning throughout their schooling career.

What seemed to surface from the interviews with teachers is that they needed a collective approach and strategy to facilitate an effective and continuous programme of action for teaching, learning, assessment and remediation.

3.5 CONCLUSION

The interviewees' responses stress the need and importance of critical action as an effective pedagogical approach to teaching and learning. It would not only enable teachers to start engaging in a deliberative, reflective and critical manner in order to begin developing a common understanding around issues pertaining the curriculum and assessment, but it would also begin to address issues around the re-skilling of teachers. This does not imply discussions to inform teachers about departmental expectations and procedures, which are considered as consultation, but allowing the voices of teachers to surface through rational debate, critical reflection and discussion, listening to their views and suggestions for the improvement of the teaching and learning experience and, through negotiated consensus, work on a programme of action. This would be an imperative to guide democratic classroom practice and develop the critical capacities of both teachers and learners.

If we as teachers hope to improve the quality of our children's education, then we need to start engaging with each other and with our learners in a more sharing, caring and nurturing manner. Our classroom practices should begin to reflect those values imbued in our Constitution and our daily engagement with learners should begin to alter classrooms into democratic spaces where learners can begin to design imaginative possibilities for an improved future.

I will explore further practices for a democratic teaching and learning environment in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I shall explore constitutive meanings of critical action with reference to the ideas of Maxine Greene (2000), Martha Nussbaum (1998) and Nancy Sherman (1989; 1999). I shall further attempt to show how each of these theorists' ideas reinforces the practice of critical action, as critical action forms the core of both the assessment framework and the curriculum statement under discussion in this thesis.

4.2 MAXINE GREENE'S NOTION OF CRITICAL ACTION

Greene (2000: 1-3) states that in order to strive towards an education system that is humane, moral, respectable and just, it becomes imperative to move away from approaches that perpetuate the status quo. Teachers need to resist the banality and technical rationality that reduce them to mere clerks and technocrats. She supports notions that concentrate on using imagination as a tool for teaching and learning. Not only does it unleash creative, critical thinking but it also enables teachers to understand those structures that have the potential of adding value or devaluing their lives. For teachers to resist an imposing structure would imply that they have to carry out a careful and in-depth examination of the merits and features of that structure to determine its impact on their interaction with learners and peers, and the possible effect this could have on their professional status and judgment. It would also imply that they have to engage intelligently in discussions and reflections about the intentions of this structure and how it could either promote or hamper educational goals that engender democratic practices in classrooms, as well as its ability to develop or constrain the critical capacities of learners. This resistance that Greene talks about represents critical action, which has to transpire in a collaborative context if the intention is to have a meaningful impact on the total teaching and learning culture at the school. It would also imply that teachers need to think about the

values that underpin such a structure and how it could possibly advance or undermine democratic practice. Using imagination as a tool for teaching and learning would imply making sense in a creative way of teaching and learning. In order for this to happen, a process of inquiry is imperative. It would also necessitate stretching one's mind or cognitive ability and weighing the merits and demerits of something different, but which could possibly work. This kind of reasoning and argument does, however, have the potential to marginalise people and create tension, conflict and pressure. It would also seem that people are regarded as controversial, undemocratic and incorrect because they begin to shake the power basis of others or of the positions that are perpetuated by a structure of organisation. Silence and subservience become the breeding ground for subjugation and oppression in different forms and the failure to question the status quo implies that people in positions of power are infallible. Teachers therefore need to negotiate their differences of opinion and reach consensus about the best way forward. This state of inquiry and delving into the consciousness is a form of critical action that requires careful, decisive and deliberate consideration.

Imagination enables teachers to understand and share the feelings and the realities of their learners. It is this imagination that enables teachers to bridge the gap between themselves and their learners, an imagination that leads to a better understanding, acceptance and making sense of how learners experience learning according to their own realities. Imagination allows teachers to empathise with their learners' realities. It creates a window that allows teachers to get a glimpse of the realities of their learners, thereby illuminating their lives (Greene, 2000: 1-3). This would enable teachers to best serve the interests of the students they deal with on a day-to-day basis and not just treat them as invisible. Greene calls this "imagine imagining" becoming a friend to someone else's mind that brings parts together and integrates them into a whole (2000: 37). For teachers to develop the ability to understand and share the feelings of learners would not mean that they empathise with the reality of learners in a patronising fashion, but that they have scrutinised and asked questions that would lead them to a deeper understanding of why learners think and act the way they do (which is like getting into someone's head to try and figure out what they

are thinking); this questioning and probing corresponds with notions of critical action. Becoming a friend to someone's mind would imply that a sense of understanding, respect, trust, caring and nurturing develops that assists learners in putting pieces of their reality together in order to develop an awareness of how it links to greater issues in their communities and society at large. This caring and nurturing restores the sense of dignity and value to the experiences of learners and elevates them to an important position, thereby starting to alter the power relations in classrooms. The concept of friendship becomes a conscious state of action used as a means of coming to know.

Freire and Shor (1987: 185) support this notion of using the imagination as a tool for learning and critical thinking, as it breaks the culture of supervising, controlling, dominating and exerting power over the consciousness of learners. Hopefully such imaginative action would enable learners to imagine alternatives that are different from their own experiences. Freire views this imagination as a kind of intuition that challenges learners to try and visualise something completely new and un-thought of before, a kind of exploring that would lead to a rigorous coming to know and reconstruction of knowledge. As stated by Freire (Freire & Shor, 1987: 187), "To anticipate tomorrow by dreaming ... a possible future of transformation ... a Utopianism as a dialectical relationship between denouncing the present and announcing the future." This view underpins notions of critical action, as it requires the examination to prove and justify why an alternative way is plausible. When Freire refers to imagination as a challenging intuition, it would imply that people do not just accept things in an unquestioning manner, but that they investigate, examine and evaluate thoroughly or conduct an extensive search in order to clarify contentions and issues that would facilitate greater understanding. This notion of critical action moves away from the practice of uniform predetermined outcomes and desired objectives as set out in the assessment framework. For me it also starts to address issues of power relations in the classroom as learners' ideas and perceptions are treated with concern, respect and sensitivity, and not as part of a pre-set vision.

The acceptance of learners' imaginative perceptions and reconstructions does not compromise the views of teachers or detract from their own thinking. It

enables teachers and learners to extend their experiences, allowing them to comprehend different human possibilities of community (Greene, 2000: 4). This notion reinforces the idea that creative thinking and learning, as part of critical action, can lead to innovative problem solving and that our difference of opinion and thought can strengthen action and facilitate transformation. It starts moving away from teaching and learning regarded as a production process with predetermined results to an environment of active, critical participation in a caring, nurturing environment.

Greene (2000: 5) posits that imagination can only be encouraged by activating dialogue in the classroom, dialogue that would lead to compromise and consensus about the end result. Therefore teachers need to start creating spaces for learners to question what they are confronted with continually. This would invariably lead to an environment where the voices of all are to be heard, one that would move towards the democracy so passionately advocated in our Constitution and education policy documents. Imaginative action also takes into account the importance of attending to the voices of all learners and entails issues of diversity being treated as inclusive and not as compartmentalised entities that do not connect to a whole. Dialogue can be considered as an imperative for critical action, as it involves discussion between people directed towards the exploration of a problem or situation with the intent of finding the best possible solution or the most acceptable way forward. A situation of compromise and consensus would imply that something has been carefully discussed, considered and analysed, while taking cognisance of conflicting opinions and ideas and reaching an agreement in order to move towards finding amicable solutions. This compromise would also involve rational debate and argument characteristic of critical action.

According to Greene (2000: 11), there is a contradiction between social discourse and schooling objectives. While social discourses are concerned with issues of equity, equality, poverty alleviation, social justice and social change, it is evident that education policy still channels teaching and learning through prescribed outcomes, test scores and standards of achievement. This has the tendency to screen learning and render learners invisible, voiceless subjects in

the classroom. These outcomes seem to view satisfying national economic and technical needs as the priority for social change, instead of developing learners' capacities to deal with ongoing social change. The prescribed objectives of education manipulate teachers and learners into passive compliance as they assume that policy takes cognisance of the existing social interests and therefore what they are engaged in at school is important. To enable learners to deal with change on an ongoing basis would require of them to deliberate critically about issues on a continuous basis. This would imply that critical engagement becomes part of their everyday life in dealing with realities or challenges, a state that can be regarded as a habit of thinking and doing. It is this continuous scrutiny that has the potential of developing the critical capacities of learners that would enable them to think about different realities. The continuous questioning, probing and looking for solutions is an act of critical action that can become habit-forming and part of the learner's character; it is this aspect that could possibly cultivate critical citizens who are urged to take action to transform society.

Greene (2000: 13) argues that the development of complex skills is not all that is needed to facilitate opportunities for meaningful jobs, but also the development of a broad range of habits of the mind. Therefore literacy in more than one medium is required if learners are to deal critically and intelligently with the challenges of life. This can only be achieved if teachers start to engage with learners in a reflective manner and interact with them as individuals who are allowed to be questioning in the process of defining themselves. This, she says, can be achieved if teachers and learners start to acquire skills of how to imagine. She uses imagination as a tool of critical action to stimulate the kind of teaching and learning that can facilitate creative, rational and reflective teaching and learning. It allows people to begin to look at possibilities that they have not thought of before and these possibilities begin to open up spaces for critical discourse and problem solving. Therefore, Greene's view is that reading and writing do not necessarily lead to literate citizens, but also the ability to engage in actions of inquiry and critique about things that affect us and the broader society. This action of critiquing should become part of our disposition or our way of doing and thinking. She also advocates the usage of a whole range of knowledge and skills when we deliberate about issues or situations, as this promotes considered

scrutiny that could lead to the most plausible solution. This careful consideration implies that we have looked at all possible angles of argument when interacting with others or deliberating about our own thoughts, motives and actions. This also implies the exercise of extreme thoughtfulness about the effect or implication it might have on the problem, issue, person or others in question, therefore weighing the options in a rational manner, which is a deliberate state of critical action.

Altrichter and Elliot (2000: 78) concur with Greene and state that imagination as an act of critical action can assist learners to appreciate a “wonderful and awesome world towards the end of revealing a divine presence”, as the mind consists of various faculties that need to be developed, so that the thinking of learners can begin to reflect and demonstrate the influence of societal change. This would imply that learners should be actively involved in order to influence their own learning and that they should be allowed to discover by searching and examining. Divine presence could refer to individuals’ unique power of imagination that enables them to examine, search and discover solutions and also their ability, through imagination, to respond to unforeseen influences. Divine presence also implies that this uniqueness of learners’ imagination should be respected and that their voices should be allowed to surface, free of ridicule or admonition.

Greene argues (2000:15) that engagement in teaching and learning can become a process of action and not behaviour as “action implies the taking of initiatives, it signifies moving into a future seen from the vantage point of an actor or agent”. Therefore learning is not a matter of doing things in a particular manner out of habit or according to the teacher’s vision, but rather involves active learning according to the realities and views of learners themselves. Teaching and learning as action does not imply looking for finite solutions with definite conclusions, but learning that is seen as the humble beginning to a process of innovative problem solving. Conclusive solutions to problems can lead to regularities and patterns that are devoid of any imagination and creativity, and without these qualities learners and teachers can claim that their understanding is inadequate. Apple (1982: 168) concurs with this view that imagination as

action allows learners to build and develop alternative meanings. This process should, however, be a normal aspect of classroom practice that should be maintained in daily discourse and interaction with others if it is to have an impact on changing habits of thinking, reasoning and understanding.

Altrichter and Elliot (2000: 77) support Greene's notion of creating meaning in a collaborative context, when they emphasise the importance of organised interaction that should be connected to the reality of others. Deliberative, conscious interaction with others therefore becomes an imperative action for constructing meaning and forging alternative possibilities. Freire (1970: 80) reiterates this notion when stating that the consciousness of the oppressed in their quest to transform their realities can be aroused only through communion with others. Acting alone alienates and marginalises people, creating a sense of hopelessness which silences or denies people opportunities to transform their realities. Dialogue and critical engagement with others creates opportunities to imagine something emerging from their hopes and this break in silence, is overcome through a constant wanting to discover. This communion with others can, however, create conflict and tensions as we all have our own perceptions of reality and what that reality should be like. Greene (2000:22) sees this interaction with others as a space of freedom that opens doors and empowers learners to choose possibilities for themselves in the light of tensions and differences. The hope lies in the fact that through constant dialogue these differences can be reconciled through negotiation and that this kind of cooperative imagining with others can begin to create opportunities that start to reflect infinite, enabling possibilities of being and can begin to create and generate a hope for a different kind of society.

When learners and teachers develop their imaginative capacity to envisage a different possibility, they come to realise that each person's reality and experiences should be differently understood and interpreted (Greene, 2000: 21). Imagination as a tool of critical action therefore enables people to appreciate an environment of difference and they learn to employ strengths proactively to advance or progress. Imagination as action breaks the habit of doing and thinking in a specific manner and accommodates and utilises diverse perceptions

to design a different and un-thought-of future. Without this realisation complete uniformity would exist leading to conformity, routine and mechanical experiences, rendering the possibility of an alternative future impoverished. “Conjoint experience” (Greene, 2000: 33) makes imagining in a democratic community accessible to learners as they experience shared meaning and decision-making through common interests. This inter-connectedness and communion with others in the classroom enables learners to freely express themselves in imaginative ways that begin to dispel fears of hopelessness and it can begin to counteract a state of social paralysis so as to restore some sense of dignity, decency and humaneness. This imagination as a form of action with others facilitates the emergence of an ethical concern (Greene, 2000: 35) that evolves in a community that consciously and deliberately acts to foster and embrace values that give it significance. My understanding of this view is that a community cannot be produced through proclamations but through common values, collaboratively negotiated for its viable existence. This synergy can only be achieved through creating spaces for people to engage in processes of critical action that could emanate in a shared vision and evolve in a new consciousness of what the future could be like.

Because realities are inter-subjective, it becomes imperative for teachers to have some understanding of this world so as to make choices that would lead learners to greater understanding that could in turn culminate in transformative ideas and actions. Greene (2000: 47) refers to knowledge as a “noxious cloud” that is invisible and therefore concealed knowledge that needs to be deciphered in order to attain greater understanding. My understanding of what she is saying is that knowledge can be dangerous and harmful, and could corrupt the mind if not critically scrutinised. It can plunge people into a state of complacent subjectivity and conformity that stunts thinking and action if not challenged and confronted in a liberating fashion. To accept without critical inquiry would be a form of silence that makes us peripheral and prevents us from overcoming the perplexities of our existence.

Because language is a tool of power, it is imperative for learners to know how to read in order to assert and articulate their own views instead of imitating the

language of teachers and memorising concepts (Greene, 2000: 55). It is only then that learners begin to critically scrutinise, challenge, confront and consciously reflect on those components that make up their realities and define their worlds. This process not only empowers learners to interact with knowledge constructs and others' perceptions in a critical manner, but it places them in a position of power and enables them to appropriate knowledge which liberates the mind, defines their identities and, as Greene (2000: 54) puts it, to make "connections in their own experiences...[and] make meaningful birth of their own rationality". This shattered invisibility and silence of learners enables them to reflect, mediate and communicate freely with others proactively in an imaginative way and creates the possibility for them to transform their world. This process of imagination as a tool for critical action enables people to develop and create a rational understanding of circumstances and situations, which opens up infinite possibilities that supersede mundane existentiality and anticipates a future that would begin to transform society.

Greene views notions of friendship, imagination and collaborative deliberation as imperatives for critical action. She also regards the values of caring, sharing and compassion as essential tools for cultivating the necessary sensitivity and empathy needed for dialogue that would urge teachers and learners to work towards changed possibilities. These values culminate in bonds of friendship between people and drive them to engage in collaborative action to alter their realities. It is the development of these values that has the potential of engendering critical citizens who have the imaginative capacity to begin to transform society.

This brings me to a discussion of the ideas of Martha Nussbaum, in particular her views on critical (imaginative) action.

4.3 MARTHA NUSSBAUM'S NOTION OF CRITICAL ACTION

For Nussbaum (1998: ix) becoming an educated citizen supersedes only mastering the techniques of reasoning. To become educated would involve the ability to use the capacity of imagination. Imagination would equip people with

the necessary skills to courageously venture beyond their local realities, in an attempt to understand others different from themselves; she refers to this as the “cultivation of humanity”. This implies that teachers and learners need to engage in imaginative deliberation to create, design or map out alternatives. To develop the ability to understand different realities to the one in which we find ourselves would necessitate collaborative dialogue and negotiated consensus, which would require inquiry and rational reasoning which represents critical action. It would require critical engagement to illuminate those conditions that have a constraining or emancipatory impact on our being. During this state of critical collaborative deliberation we are urged to think about the question of morality based on rules and principles (Nussbaum, 1998: 10). Life is not simple and straightforward but complex and therefore, while it is necessary to respect these rules, the moral faculty of discretion needs to be developed to assist us in making intelligent judgements. Any culture committed to justice would encourage inquiry through reflection that would enable people to see the limitations of principles. She sees this kind of questioning and inquiry as the systematisation of the intuition about what is right and just. It is this intuition that would guide people to make the correct decision in times of calamity. If learners are not given the opportunity to exercise their moral judgement and trust their intuition, their discretionary skills will be impoverished, rendering them incapable of making sound judgements and choices pertaining to matters that affect their lives. It therefore becomes imperative for teachers to create spaces where learners are able to imagine possibilities about their future in relation to the realities of others, in order to create a changed future. Considering Nussbaum’s view of imagination as action for learning and teaching illuminates the fact that imagination becomes an indispensable tool to unleash critical action that has the potential of evolving into transformative practices.

Being a fervent exponent of Socratic education that encourages learners to think for themselves, Nussbaum postulates that learning logical analysis cannot take place in a vacuum, but should be linked to current events and ideas. This could be done by dissecting knowledge constructs found in news, newspapers, books, arguments about current controversies and critical thinking about the core of the perceptions and views that define people and their realities (Nussbaum, 1998: 4).

This approach encourages teaching and learning which are connected to issues of the broader society, an idea that departs from the compartmentalisation of the learning experience in terms of prescribed outcomes and objectives. Giving learners the opportunity to reason “out of the box” implies equipping them to become good reflective citizens capable of self-scrutiny (Nussbaum, 1998: 12). Learners should therefore be guided to engage in a continuous mode of introspection so as to develop their ability to reason and critically examine their opinions, beliefs, cultures, religions and actions, and those of others. This mode of critical deliberation not only has the potential to develop the faculties of the mind, but it also becomes emancipatory and has the potential to engender transformation.

Although books have an important role to play on the path to self-discovery, they should not be used as authorities (Nussbaum, 1998: 19). Learners should not be limited to one set of curricula, but a variety of interdisciplinary sources that would broaden their understanding and expand their horizons. The danger exists that learners tend to internalise concepts and facts and base their understanding on only one opinion instead of being exposed to diverse views about situations and phenomena. Using one set of curricula tends to limit the scope of their understanding, stunt active reasoning and gives learners a “false concept of wisdom” (Nussbaum, 1998: 20). Books also do not take cognisance of the learners’ realities and the use of prescribed books would imply that learners from diverse backgrounds are expected to respond to the same text, a text that they might not find relevant. There is no doubt that books play an important role in the appropriation of knowledge; however, Nussbaum urges teachers to guide learners to use the information they discover imaginatively as a tool to support effective learning. Words are dead entities that lose their passivity and only come alive through critical deliberative engagement and the spontaneity of our uniqueness. It is only when learners are in command of their own learning that they can take charge of their own reasoning and begin to develop the creative possibilities of a tomorrow. The ability to take charge of one’s own life implies personal empowerment, therefore Nussbaum advocates individual development as an imperative for understanding or gaining better insight into the realities of others. Taking charge of one’s own life would necessitate a process of critical

action through which we gain the knowledge and the confidence to challenge our realities, and from this position of power we are able to understand others and situations different from our own.

Nussbaum (1998: 85) cites Heraclites, who stated that “learning about many things does not produce understanding”. Teachers need to cultivate in learners the capacity for sympathetic imagination that will enable them to understand the motives and choices of others. It is only when learners start sharing problems, experiences and possibilities with each other in a deliberative imaginative way that they can begin to develop an understanding of, and empathy with, realities different from their own. These differences not only sharpen our understanding of our own reality but also shape the choices, desires thoughts and actions people begin to take. By understanding and empathising with others, learners also develop their moral capacities as they begin to develop compassion and sensitivity to the life situation of others. Nussbaum regards the ability to employ moral judgement (the values of empathy, compassion and sensitivity) in an attempt to understand difference, as a process of critical action. It therefore becomes imperative for education to start producing citizens who can take charge of their own reasoning by exposing themselves to diverse contexts and equipping them with the capacity to critically engage in processes of introspection and deliberation with others.

Nussbaum (1998: 7) endorses Socrates’ philosophy that an “unexamined life is not worth living” as questioning and rational examination are indispensable components of life for every citizen and for any democracy. Can one be regarded as a citizen in a democracy if one’s choices and actions are dictated by others and where others shape one’s beliefs? Are you regarded as a good learner if you slavishly follow the teacher’s instructions without questioning? I do not think so. This subservient behaviour only prevents us from exercising our own choices and developing our own beliefs, and denies people the right to act as citizens who have the potential of contributing to change. Nussbaum (1998: 10) regards this expected “obedience” as a form of keeping people powerless and in line, a form of injustice and immorality. Therefore the central task of education should be to challenge the passivity of learners so that they can take

charge of, and responsibility for, their own perceptions and actions. Nussbaum (1998: 5) contends that argument is not undemocratic; it is essential if any democracy is to be lasting and meaningful. A democracy can only be meaningful if people have the opportunity to reflectively and deliberatively engage with others about issues that affect them. It is this kind of Socratic dialogue and reasoning which facilitates civic freedom and that has the potential to produce critical citizens who can start confronting the atrocities of society in order to create an improved reality.

Critical examination and rational argument facilitate reason and the rational freedom that enables learners to face the core of their emotions, such as fear and rage, as they have been socialised to act in a certain manner out of habit (Nussbaum, 1998: 15). Through this process of questioning motives, habits are broken and learners are infused with the will to take charge of their emotions and become better equipped to deal with their own feelings and motives and those of others. This emotional maturity that Nussbaum talks about has the potential to engender critical citizens who have the capacity and will to change their own realities and thereby contribute to the transformation of society.

Nussbaum uses notions of imagination and moral development as imperatives for critical action. She postulates that imagination has the power to influence the moral capacities of people and infuse the learning and teaching experience with the necessary values that would enable teachers and learners to engage in deliberative and rational argument in a sympathetic, compassionate and empathetic manner. She argues that moral education and the utilisation of imagination as tools of critical action could develop the kind of unity that is required to engender critical citizens, who through their actions can begin to transform society and create different possibilities for a changed and better future.

This brings me to a discussion of the ideas of Nancy Sherman, in particular her views on critical action.

4.4 NANCY SHERMAN'S NOTION OF CRITICAL ACTION

Sherman's (1999: 233) exposition of citizenship supersedes the notion that only the development of cognitive skills and the mastering of techniques and procedures can lead to the development of critical citizens. She concurs with Greene and Nussbaum that rational reasoning, imagination and shared learning are imperatives for self-realisation, which has the potential of evolving into critical citizenship. I shall expound specifically her ideas of how the cultivation of a virtuous citizen and the building of character link to notions of critical action. I shall further discuss her notion that critical action facilitates the nurturing of learners, who are capable of competent judgements and reactions that enable them to extrapolate in ways consistent with the spirit of democratic citizenship.

The operative question that Sherman (1999: xi) addresses is how individuals are trained to become aware of the requirements of the situation that prompts them to virtuous action. Virtue refers to behaviour showing high moral standards or qualities that are considered morally good or desirable. Morality in turn would refer to principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behaviour of the character. Character is the mental distinctiveness of an individual and the strength and originality in a person's nature that prompts them to behaviour that is considered right and acceptable. Therefore, what Sherman addresses is the development of character to display specific behaviour. She draws on Aristotelian views that practical rationality does not come into being because of calculated procedures or by top-down inference of rules, but through deliberative engagement that allows us to reach conclusions about circumstances (Sherman, 1999: xii). What Sherman argues for is the development of educational goals that emerge through carefully considered dialogue and not through imposing procedures or a pre-set vision of the teaching and learning experience. Therefore the assumptions and social practices that define our realities or the values, knowledge and beliefs that determine how we relate to society, which we acquire through our own experiences, should be the determinant factors when constructing goals for the learning and teaching experience. Practical rationality, as the practice of critical action, would enable learners to reflect intelligently on their experiences in a deliberative and

collaborative manner in attempt to create meaning or greater understanding. She quotes Nussbaum (1999: xii) to the effect that it is “practical insight that allows perceiving in the sense that is non-inferential, non-deductive; it is an ability to recognise the salient features of a complex situation”. Therefore, it is not rules that guide actions, but the practical experiences of people and their discernment of situations, which includes drawing on the emotions and imagination. This poses the question of how a character that performs virtuous action can be developed? Sherman (1989: 1) defines character as traits of attitude, sensibility and belief that affect how people see, act and live, and as that component of people that prompts them to behave in certain ways and makes their actions accountable. Emotions and reason are part of character and are responsible for moral responses that are relevant, correct and necessary in specific situations. To act morally would imply emotional engagement, which involves practical wisdom, vision and sensitivity. Sherman (1999: 122) describes sensitivity as knowledge acquired through experience. We therefore know how to respond to situations because of previous exposure. Practical wisdom involves the identification and recognition of biases and weaknesses that impact negatively on a state of deliberation and progress. Therefore, achieving a state of virtue does not begin by making choices, but by recognising the relevant circumstances of a situation and through a process of reasoning come to conclusions (Sherman, 1989: 3). For me, reaching a conclusion does not mean finding absolute answers to situations, but arriving at what we perceive to be the most reasonable solution to specific situations that could change depending on altered circumstances over time. Sherman views the development of virtue as an important component of learning that would enable learners to gain insight and acquire understanding of their experiences. Engaging in the process of reflective collaboration would imply practising critical action, which has the potential to equip learners with the ability to use their emotions in an imaginative way and to develop a character capable of making the correct choices and decisions.

A state of deliberation produces tensions and conflicts, a form of dilemma that needs to be collaboratively negotiated before a state of consensus can be reached. People therefore design a solution together with others in order to reach a common goal. It is this designing together that Sherman (1989: 6) refers

to as the shared activities that engender the formation of friendships, which enable individuals to expand their horizons as it facilitates the probing, assessing and redefining of motives. During these shared activities one's views are confirmed and strengthened or challenged by the experiences of others. By sharing in joint activity one becomes aware of others' commitments to a course and it exposes one to different ways of doing and thinking. Sherman (1999: 291) states that this joint activity allows the individual to experience a sense of pleasure and satisfaction, because he or she is an active participant who contributes to a larger whole. It is this sense of satisfaction that eventually sustains deliberative, reflective engagement and the continuousness of friendship. In the light of democratic decision-making these friendships remain stable, because the feelings of friendship are produced by a form of self-expression that is embraced and protected by the rational position of the whole. This stability is also strengthened because people who engage in democratic decision-making processes share the same values and are committed to the same goals and it is this process that evolves into responsible citizenry. Sherman therefore sees the capacity to form friendships as the application of critical action that could enhance the ability of learners to engage in democratic practices. It is this notion of friendship as a practice of critical action that can foster in learners the necessary morals needed to transform society.

The friendships that are formed mark a sense of affection and caring that creates a state of interdependence, or as Sherman calls it an "attachment" to others, that in Aristotelian terms is referred to as a state of habituation. Habituation (Sherman, 1999: xiii) is not senseless drill, repetition or a form of rote learning, but a cognitive shaping of, and critical reflection on, desires through perception, belief and intention that continually need to be assessed, critiqued and ultimately redefined. Brave actions require just actions, which we cultivate habitually with others, and this process evolves into the building of character. Friendship as a state of habituation enables us to constantly engage in activities with others who share our interests and, because of this habituation with friends, we are better equipped to pursue our objectives and sustain our activities vigorously. In this light, it becomes imperative for teachers to form friendships with learners in order to cultivate a sense of care that is concerned with appraisal that does not expect

projection of another's ideas or inflict control over learners, but entails the type of care that leads learners to a state of self-realisation. Sherman (1999: 317) posits that the care that constitutes a virtuous citizen's friendship with other citizens is similar to the "complete friends" that Aristotle refers to. They are virtuous, know each other well and continuously engage with each other in shared activities. This does not imply that they are friends who are always together and, as a matter of fact, they might not even be familiar with each other's particulars, but the binding factor is their shared goals and values that guide the decisions and practices of their community. Citizen friends engage in numerous relationships of association, because the basis of their friendship is the commitment to certain values and goals. Friends who care for each other in the Aristotelian sense enjoy exercising each other's reasoning and have the freedom to critique one another's views and actions without deceit or being patronising. It is through caring in this non-instrumental and non-debilitating sense that teachers can deliver genuine critique that would ensure that learners could begin to imagine different possibilities of their future through their own experiences of their realities. It would also imply that teachers create a non-threatening environment where learners can form friendships with other learners in class, an environment where they can deliberate critically about issues that affect their lives. Because of being propelled by a common goal of finding the most suitable and relevant solution to situations, their friendships become congenial and allow them to hone in on each other's perceptions with candour and sensitivity. Therefore cooperative moral education is an imperative for cultivating the perceptual and deliberative capacities necessary for responsible adulthood and critical citizenship.

Deliberation implies critically scrutinising each other's perceptions, assessing alternatives and the impact of the ends that are considered as priorities. It would also imply the judgement of actions and re-adjusting the agreed upon solutions or alternatives. Sherman (1999: 244) concedes that this type of deliberation might be too advanced for learners at certain levels, but if teachers do not expose learners to these processes, even in a simplistic way, how are they to exercise discretionary powers and their rational capacities of reasoning in the more mature phases of their youth and adulthood? To obtain practice in deliberative activities is a way of working out, with appropriate guidance, a practice in action

that facilitates making practice in choice-making a prerequisite for decision-making (Sherman, 1999: 245). This process of practice has the potential of engendering virtuous action, as the contributions of all are valued for the good of the community.

During this process of repetition or practice of critical reflection, it is important to prevent our actions from becoming mechanical reactions to situations, devoid of discretionary powers. This implies that we do not perform the same actions over and over again, but employ our critical capacities to contextually define situations and use the judgements, emotions and behaviour of other just actions to improve realities. Our emotions based on experience will enable us, through critical and reflective inquiry, not to repeat the mistakes of the past, but use those experiences to make things better (Sherman, 1999: 247). We therefore utilise our critical capacities to modify our own thinking and actions and that of others to overcome a state of procrastination; this is done for the sake of progress and to contribute towards meaningful change. To make rational choices would require the critical guidance of teachers so as to create an awareness of the implications of one's perceptions and actions. This does not imply systematic rules and procedures, but ways of "reacting, seeing and understanding which will aim at establishing enduring patterns of action" (Sherman, 1999: 250). The implication is that teachers themselves need to acquire the kind of disposition that allows them to exercise guidance over their learners' responses that would lead to just actions. Teachers would therefore also need to undergo a process of introspection and critical examination of their historical baggage, and to practice virtuous actions and emotions before they can guide the learner towards more critical deliberations.

The individual as part of a community experiences a sense of self-realisation as their individual perceptions are respected and count for something. It is only when critical deliberation becomes a habit that our discourses can begin to reflect the vigour and tenacity required of critical citizens, whose virtuous actions have the potential to transform society.

Sherman states that friendship and imagination are central to critical action, which is imperative for cultivating the necessary virtues for moral maturity. In an environment of friendships individuals are nurtured to experience a state of self-realisation by having the opportunity to critically and reflectively examine their own beliefs and the values that define their existence. This moral maturity would enable learners to better understand themselves and the world around them and opens up possibilities for education to engender critical citizens who are capable through shared experiences and friendship to transform themselves and society.

4.5 CONCLUSION

Greene, Nussbaum and Sherman use notions of friendship and imagination as expressions of critical action that has the power to develop a virtuous and moral character capable of transforming society. These friendships are networks that are formed through imaginative, reflective and rational argument, practices that are modes of critical action. These collaborative networks are not self-destructive but rather forums for self-criticism, a practice that is central to critical theory. These networks create spaces for individuals to express themselves and exercise choices in a way that will not jeopardise the relationships that they value and enjoy. This does not imply that individuals conform to the values of these friendships or that the creativity and decision-making of individuals are stifled by the collective, but that the collective, through a sense of caring and sharing as tools of critical action, assists in the process of moulding learners' perceptions. This process of action enables learners to make informed decisions from a position of power, a process that fosters democratic practices. Greene, Nussbaum and Sherman postulate that democracy evolves through the sense of justice of responsible individuals, who as citizens are willing to participate and cooperate with self-constraint, respect and trust, which they refer to as virtues. Democratic citizens therefore not only participate in processes of critical inquiry, but also commit themselves through an alliance of friendships to construct collective meaning and mutual understanding through imagining different possibilities for the future. These friendships involve individuals who, through collaborative, reflective and rational activity, are tied together in communities of

citizens who can in turn, through imaginative possibilities, begin to change their destiny.

It is in the spirit of Greene's "releasing the imagination", Nussbaum's "cultivating humanity" and Sherman's "the fabric of character" that education can engage in critical practices that begin to cultivate a generation of critical citizens who, apart from the complexities of their humanity, share the common goal of re-shaping society. This concept of citizenship as a deliberate process of critical action moves away from notions of instrumental action – typical of current assessment practices discussed in the previous chapters – and has the potential of engendering the kind of transformation that could create the hope of a better and brighter future, not only for the individual but also for society as a whole.

CHAPTER 5

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I shall attempt to re-conceptualise assessment in terms of critical action. I shall further argue how critical assessment action(s) departs from instrumental action and also show how it can potentially improve assessment practices in classrooms.

5.2 TOWARDS A RECONCEPTUALISATION OF ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

The main thrust of assessment in OBE for grades R – 9, as outlined in the National Education Policy Act of 1996 (Act No. 27 of 1996), focuses on identifying, gathering and interpreting information about a learner's achievement against nationally agreed upon learning outcomes and assessment standards. This process involves "generating and collecting evidence of achievement, evaluating this evidence against the outcomes, recording the findings of the evaluation and using the acquired information to assist the learner's development and improve the process of learning and teaching" (Government Gazette, 1998: 9). Learning outcomes are defined as a description of what (knowledge, skills and values) learners should know at the end of a certain phase and would be gauged through a set of prescribed assessment standards. Assessment standards are described as the level at which learners should demonstrate achievement of the learning outcome and the ways (depth and breadth) of demonstrating their achievement, which is regarded as being indicative of their conceptual progression (DoE, 2001: 14). The purpose of OBE is to develop learners who will be able to identify and solve problems through creative and critical thinking, with the main aim of developing into critical and active citizenship.

The assessment policy further advocates a learner-centred approach to teaching and learning through co-operative group-work methods, while taking cognisance

of the different realities of learners. This implies a dialectical and dialogical relationship between learners, teachers, peers, assessment and the curriculum. It also places the emphasis on what learners should be able to do as opposed to just acquiring an understanding of knowledge constructs. This notion of teaching and learning opens up possibilities for epistemological discourse that includes components of dialogue, deliberation, reflection and critique, a process that has the potential of engendering critical and active citizens who, through their actions, can begin to transform society.

It would seem as if OBE would be able to achieve its objective of generating critical thinkers; however, its instrumental justification of education through the prescription of predetermined outcomes and assessment standards can be compared to the “noxious cloud” that Greene (2000: 45) refers to, which has a debilitating and paralysing effect on reflective, rational and imaginative critical thinking and action. Waghid (2002: 9) corroborates this argument by stating that “the idea of prescribed outcomes seems to be attuned to an instrumentally justifiable view of education, which makes it difficult for rational reflection and imagination to be realised.

I argue for a position of critical action and, because rational reasoning is a component of critical action, I need to explore critical notions of rationality to determine how it is undermined by instrumental action. Giroux (1983: 171) views rationality as a set of assumptions and social practices that mediate how individuals or groups relate to broader society. Therefore, rationality can be regarded as a set of interests that determine how we reflect on the world. The knowledge, beliefs, perceptions and biases that underpin our rationality are informed by our experiences. These experiences only become meaningful when we are able to intelligently reflect or discuss them in a deliberative manner. Giroux (1983: 172) further states that rationality cannot be divorced from the concept of the problematic. Therefore we need to analyse the motives of our questions as well those motives which are absent and that could possibly affect our future deliberations, as motives can either advance or undermine our course. A notion of education that separates teachers and learners from educational goals not only ignores the dignity of peoples’ beliefs and histories, but it also

perpetuates a culture of compliance and conformity. This culture entrenches a state of complacency that makes it very difficult for critical citizens to develop and meaningfully transform themselves and society.

Conceiving educational goals that would engender critical action would imply moving away from a notion that is linked to instrumental action and would necessitate that learning and teaching goals be developed within and not outside of what is conceived by teachers and learners as reality. A context developed outside this reality can be regarded as a form of manipulation and control, and has the potential to subvert critical action. The prescribed outcomes of the assessment policy were developed outside the realities of learners and imposed on teaching and learning, therefore separating content from context leading to irrelevant learning experiences, which detract from critical activity. The prescribed goals of the assessment policy digress from Greene's (2000), Nussbaum's (1998) and Sherman's (1989; 1999) view of critical action as the passionate, pervasive efforts of committed individuals acting in unison, under unconstrained conditions, to transform their inter-subjective worlds. The separation of educational goals from context and practice, and from subject and object, has the potential of limiting the scope for imaginative, rational, reflective and deliberative dialogue, thereby restricting the possibility of meaningful critical action to unfold.

Critical action can only take place under unconstrained conditions, and so the prescription of outcomes has compartmentalised learning and teaching, and placed them into little boxes that make it difficult for either learners or teachers to become passionate about something they have not created. How are learners expected to anticipate possibilities of a different future and redefine their realities, based on expectations and knowledge enforced upon them? How are teachers supposed to provide a learner-centred critique on understanding and performance based on content and context that are not learner-centred? The notion of subjecting thinking and performance (action) to a definite result that has to be achieved is an instrumental approach to teaching and learning, and this imposition of outcomes depart from an understanding of what critical action entails.

Instrumental action defines what teachers have to do and learners need to know. Pring (2000: 25) argues that, if teachers deliver someone else's curriculum with its precisely defined product, that curriculum becomes a transaction that roots the teacher in a different cultural tradition, which makes it difficult for them to respond to the needs of learners. When learners become clients or customers, they are denied a traditional apprenticeship into that community of learners. When the product becomes the measurable target according to which the performance of learners is audited, then little significance is attached to the desire to make sense in a creative manner. My difficulty with instrumental notions of education is therefore that it results in detachment and mechanical responses from learners and stunts their creativity, as it does not have any impact on their own realities. Instrumental objectives treat schools as a labour market that produces according to prescriptive outputs. It treats learners as workers who need to perform specified tasks to obtain credits or compensation, and hence learning becomes a cheap commodity acquired by subscribing to a set of specific requirements that have been imported from somewhere else. Learners' cognitive skills are not assessed according to the potential of their ability to engage in critical activity, but according to the degree of their responses to a set of predetermined goals.

Sherman, Greene and Nussbaum argue that critical action begins by imaginatively questioning, exposing and challenging the assumptions and contradictions that encapsulate our consciousness and the experiences of our own realities. Critical action becomes a process in the making when learners are able to share their ideas and experiences with others in an environment of trust and respect. This interactive and reflective deliberative process culminates in a web of friendships and relationships that are driven by common values and a spirit of caring and sensitivity, which enables learners to expose themselves without fear of admonition or ridicule. Greene (2000: 62) refers to this collaboration and "thinking within" as a context of solidarity, where the action of critiquing within a shared context becomes "the dance of life". This is symbolic of the relationship between learner and teacher, and other learners who engage in processes not only to re-define their realities in a critical manner but who "dance" together to determine what is relevant for the process of teaching and learning to take place in a meaningful way. I regard this as the essence of creating spaces

for learners to start deliberating about their histories in a rational and reflexive way. Using the familiar as a point of departure for critical action would enable learners to develop the confidence to critique the unfamiliar or distant. Critical action would, therefore, be the translation of our experiences that enable us to engender new ways of thinking about our realities and the future of society. The prescribed outcomes of the assessment policy would limit the scope for this “dance of life” to take place as learning is regarded as a means to an end and not as a means for self-realisation and empowerment.

Because empowerment is linked to personal growth, development and self-realisation, it is important to stop at this point to look at constitutive meanings of empowerment, a word we so flagrantly use in our democracy to determine how we are able to assert ourselves. It is also important because it is inextricably linked to the capacity of strength and confidence to engage in critical and reflective dialogue. Giroux (1989: 189) defines empowerment “as the process whereby students acquire the means to critically appropriate knowledge existing outside their immediate experience in order to broaden their understanding of themselves, the world and the possibilities for transforming the taken-for-granted assumptions about the way we live”. Empowerment is therefore gained from knowledge and social relations that recognise and dignify our socially related existence, language and cultural traditions. Empowerment is a state that enables learners to consciously interrogate and selectively appropriate those aspects of the dominant culture that will provide them with the basis for defining and transforming, rather than accepting in a passive and un-contested manner. Empowerment culminates in a collective dialectical celebration of critique and possibility that enables people to transform their realities.

It is the cultivation of one’s critical discriminatory abilities through a process of “habituation” that Sherman refers to as a state that gradually develops through sharing and a sense of caring. I would also equate it with Sherman’s state of virtuous character, which encompasses modes of affect, choice and perception that equip us with practical wisdom and the ability to deliberate with practical reasoning. I also imagine that empowerment is what Nussbaum refers to as the Socratic capacity to reason about beliefs that would involve questioning, rational

inquiry and critical argument in a reflective way. Empowerment is therefore a way of challenging our beliefs that would evolve into a state of self-scrutiny in order to make sense of our reality and the world around us. This would be a state of the self that promotes rational freedom to use our imaginative abilities sensitively and compassionately in solidarity with others, to cultivate humanity and a sense of friendships that would enable us to forge possibilities of a different and improved tomorrow. I also see empowerment, according to Greene's exposition, as a state of habit that guides our ability to reason and act in a rational reflective manner. We release our imagination for self-reflection and also to search collaboratively for meaning in an attempt to break through our nondescript daily lives. A state of empowerment allows us to apply initiative and construct the mind and the consciousness to break the habit of a passive, unexamined existence. Empowerment can therefore be regarded as the capacity of the mind and emotions to develop a dialectical relationship, a coming together out of shared commitment and using imagination to transform society. Instrumental action erodes the potential for this kind of collective dialogical celebration, in that it subjects teachers and learners to specified goals. It reduces the scope of the need to inquire how human experiences are produced, contested and legitimated within everyday life and within classrooms. Limiting the understanding of what makes one a self- and a socially constituted agent would imply limiting the enhancement of creative human possibility.

Instrumental objectives reduce the role of teachers to that of mere technicians and overseers, whose task it is to ensure that the "tools" provided to test learning and progress work. Ghaye and Ghaye (1998: 4) use Schön's critique that technical rationality separates practice from theory and reduces teachers to technicians, as theoretical knowledge is generated outside the teaching and learning context and determines the outputs to be achieved. Schools are spaces of practice and teachers, as components of these spaces, have the task of applying this theoretical knowledge to facilitate the teaching and learning experience. Instrumental action is considered as an application of theory to practice and devalues the knowledge that develops about and through the teaching and learning experience. The "coming to know" that Sherman, Greene and Nussbaum talk about when referring to a solidarity in teaching and learning,

that develops out of shared critical engagement, is diluted and undermined by instrumental action.

Teachers are further regarded as technicians, as they seldom question the values that underpin their practice and the context in which they are teaching and how this actually liberates or constricts what they do. A technicist approach to education does not conflate the teaching and learning relationship and departs from notions of critical action, which sees the teacher in a shared relationship and friendship with learners, who co-determine the framework of procedural values – a framework that respects the learning needs of learners and mediates the aspects of their cultures that meet those needs. This framework would include traditions and narratives that are products of deliberation, argument and criticism about the life-experiences of learners. It is a framework that allows learners to understand and appreciate their histories and enables them to engage in a dialogue about these realities with passion, thereby making the learning experience relevant and reflective (Pring, 2000: 28). It is only when learners can understand and rationally reflect on their own thinking and circumstances that they are able to engage in a dialogue with others in a critical fashion so as to possibly debunk imposed perceptions and understandings, and it is this process that begins to open up spaces for imagining changed possibilities.

Because assessment policy is organised along the lines of specified outcomes, the scope of critical interaction becomes limited. The teacher develops activities according to the prescriptions of the policy and uses assessment criteria to measure the learner's level of competency. The learners' conceptual progress and understanding are measured against that specific activity only, without taking cognisance of what they know and their ability to engage critically with a body of knowledge in a holistic way. They progress through the system with speed and this is articulated as successful teaching and learning. The potential exists for learners to be marginalised or penalised, because their ideas might not reflect that which is required from them. Instrumental action minimises interaction among learners and teachers, as well as interaction among teachers. Collegiality amongst teachers declines as goals have already been set for teaching and learning. This has the potential of disengaging teachers and learners from peers

and colleagues, because they tend to work in isolation from others and fall prey to the habit of following rules and procedures. This process of functioning in isolation is an individualistic approach that is pernicious, as it encourages mechanical action and inhibits imaginative, reflective and rational collaboration, which is regarded as an essential tool for critical action. With these essentials of critical action eliminated, curriculum deliberation, planning and designing for teaching and learning strategies for specific individuals with different needs, based on intimate knowledge about them, becomes deficient and impoverished.

Instrumental education uses information to solve problems and improve the scope in which teaching and learning are managed and organised. They are implemented for the sake of structural development and in many instances to boast of success. An approach that leans toward problem solving has the tendency to limit and inhibit the creative capacities of learners, as they tend to find solutions for only the specified situations. This dichotomises the teacher-pupil relationship and impoverishes the kind of dialogue that could possibly lead to reflexive action and imaginative solutions. Freire (Freire and Macedo, 1998: 75) argues that a problem-posing as opposed to a problem-solving approach stimulates the possibility of narration and cognition, thereby reinforcing the dialogical relationship between teachers and learners. Learners become co-investigators in dialogue with teachers that emanate in the unmasking of their reality that is submerged in their consciousness. In this problem-posing context learners are increasingly challenged with problems related to them and their world, and they begin to see situations as inter-related parts of a whole. Because learners develop a deeper understanding of their reality, the dialogue becomes more critical and less alienating, and this increases their commitment to investigation and probing, which sustains critical action. This process has a liberating impact, as learners come to develop the power to perceive critically and understand why they think and act as they do, and why certain conditions are prevalent in society. It is this kind of dialogue that has the potential to engender critical citizens who participate in decision-making processes and engage in actions that would begin to transform their realities.

Instrumental action implies a learning process related to systems, procedures and formulae that measure outcomes quantitatively. This not only restricts imaginative communication in classrooms, but programmes interaction and social relations. Giroux (1983: 210) corroborates this view when he argues that central to instrumental ideology and its view of theory is the notion that social relations are subject to quantification. Knowledge according this view is objective, outside the existence of the learner and subject to the demands of exact and precise formulation. Knowledge is collected and arranged so that it can be directed in the interest of empirical verification. Therefore knowledge only becomes relevant to the degree that it can be regarded as a description and explanation of objective data viewed as priority, as in the case of possible laws. Instrumental action therefore subjects itself to reductionist logic in that it assesses questions that needed to be addressed as well as those aspects that have not been addressed, ignoring the values grounded in the results.

The practice of assessing competency and the learning experience against expected outcomes produces a discourse that suppresses the idea of assessing what learners know according to their life experiences, therefore distancing them from the culture and values that underpin their histories. This notion of objectifying learning implies that learning can only take place when it can be measured against some criteria, and the reasons for subscribing to certain values and beliefs that influence our thinking and actions become irrelevant, and it removes the scope of rational reasoning. Giroux (1983: 211) considers this approach to learning as steps to measure control, as there is no regard for the normative principles that govern the selection, organisation and distribution of knowledge. Instrumental action removes social practices that enhance sharing and friendship from the teaching and learning experience, and issues of power and conflict remain concealed or camouflaged. By disregarding the cultural capital of learners, instrumental action limits literacy to mastery and appropriation of predetermined knowledge and skills and, therefore, literacy is treated as a commodity.

Ideology that determines the context for teaching and learning removes teachers and learners from meaningful active participation in either the construction of

knowledge or the sharing of power. Notions of critical thinking, culture and power that are regarded as imperatives for learning and what Giroux (1983: 216) refers to as capital accumulation disappears. According to notions of critical action, this does not enhance individual self-esteem as it has the tendency to isolate learners and teachers in the process of teaching and learning. Learners feel exposed and this usually results in their silence and passive co-operation. Critical dialogue brings people closer together, build networks of friendships and promotes better communication and understanding. Members of this collaborative network are willing to take greater risks as they feel that they are in a situation of friendship, trust and care, and that if their ideas are depleted or they make mistakes then the group would be there for them. This collaborative network creates stronger bonds for sharing and creates a kind of family in a sense. This supportive environment of trust and respect has the potential of maintaining itself and reinforces collegiality of a critical nature.

Since the objective of education policy is to engender critical citizens, I shall explore notions of citizenship education. Giroux (1983: 174) uses Kant's argument that the purpose of education is to better prepare learners for improved conditions of humanity and therefore schools need to be sites of contestation and struggle. Very few students have the power to define their educational experiences and the role of mediating and defining the educational process rests on teachers. In this context the role of citizenship education is twofold. Firstly, through citizenship education teachers begin to address the expansion of their theoretical understanding. This implies that teachers need to develop the capacity to think critically about the nature of their own beliefs and how these beliefs influence and impact on learners. It also implies that teachers need to understand the context of their beliefs, values and practices within a broader context so as to face their own ideological constraints. Teachers therefore need to understand how the school experience is linked to structures in broader society and the inter-relatedness between culture, power and transformation. Citizenship education could assist teachers to see their educational practices as historical and social products, and how these practices manifest themselves in social relations in the classroom and in the curriculum. This kind of empowerment has the potential of illuminating classroom practices and could

enable teachers to become better, informed citizens and more effective agents of change and transformation.

Citizenship education could equip teachers to understand the concept of power and how it is used to dominate and undermine. Their potential to reformulate the concept of power would enable them to alter the power relations in classrooms and promote the kinds of knowledge, values and social relationships that can be regarded as legitimate educational concerns. Teachers learn to identify structuring concepts that are silent in texts or any other form of curriculum material, because knowledge can be regarded as a powerful vehicle of control and domination, especially in the light of teachers acting as mediators of knowledge. Citizenship education also enables teachers to problematise issues (Giroux, 1983: 172), which they could use for classroom discussions and as a means of connecting classroom practices to issues in broader society. Citizenship education can enable teachers to see the relationship between the formal and hidden curriculum, and how this links to practices in the broader society. This implies that teachers would attempt to understand the contradictions, conflicts and tensions in society, and how these offer possibilities for raising the consciousness of learners to enable them to make intelligent decisions. Therefore, by analysing their own rationality, teachers can begin to change the classroom experiences for learners and assist them to develop a greater sense of social awareness so as to transform their realities. This can lead to the accumulation and distribution of cultural capital that empower learners. The creation of this awareness can be regarded as “the first step in getting learners to act as ‘engaged’ citizens willing to question and confront the structural basis and nature of the larger social order” (Giroux, 1983: 200).

Secondly, citizenship education should be emancipatory and stimulate the passions, imaginations and intellects of learners, so that they will be moved to engage in processes that challenge and question the social, political and economic forces that affect their realities. Therefore, citizenship education restructures classroom relations in a way that would allow learners not only to critically analyse their realities, but also to afford them with opportunities to produce new meaning that would enable them to think and act in ways that speak

of different social possibilities and ways of living (Giroux, 1983:202). Citizenship education develops the capacity of learners to reason critically, analyse and understand their own histories in order to clarify their values, beliefs and understanding of how these values determine the way in which they think and act.

My view is that current assessment policy with its predetermined outcomes is imposing, assimilationist and limits the scope of reflective teaching and learning. It is an instrumental approach to education that does not cultivate a culture of sharing, caring, trust, respect and friendships in classrooms that can transcend habits of silence and mechanical action. It does not foster the habit of critical, rational reasoning and deliberative dialogue that has the potential of developing critical citizens who can begin to transform society.

This brings me to a discussion of what the new assessment approach ought to be, considering that my argument has been to move away from instrumental action towards education that is based on principles of critical action.

5.3 ASSESSMENT AS A LEARNER-CENTRED PRACTICE

If assessment is to be learner-centred, it should be constructed with learners, taking cognisance of their realities. This implies a dialectical and dialogical relationship between teachers and learners and between the curriculum and assessment. A dialectical relationship would involve the logical, rational and reflective discussions of one's own and opposing or different ideas and opinions. A dialogical relationship would involve discussion directed towards the exploration of a subject or resolution of a problem from the vantage point of learners. Assessment should enable learners to appropriate knowledge that could facilitate the understanding of their own realities against the broader context of community life or the mechanisms of how different forms of life have been produced as well as the power relations involved in the process of construction. This notion of critical action differs from instrumental learning in that instrumental action treats knowledge in a technical manner and divorces it from issues of power (Giroux, 1989: 190). Engaging learners in assessment

tasks that build on their own experiences and understanding would be a form of empowerment that not only develops and enhances the capacities of learners to critically reason, but also entails practices that enhance individual autonomy by giving learners the power to imagine the possibility of an improved future. Assessment should therefore give learners the power and authority through critical action not only to develop an understanding of different modes of existence, but also to construct different possibilities of their realities. This would have the potential of maintaining and sustaining the desire to engage in assessment tasks instead developing feelings of resistance and anxiety towards a process that learners find isolating and alienating. The more learners are able to cope with unstructured situations, define problems, design alternatives, the more they develop the motivation to engage in processes of critical action. Providing learners with the opportunity of re-shaping their realities is providing them with the opportunity to experience the sense of making a difference and harnesses the development of social responsibility.

Assessment should be designed to produce public information about the quality of the learners' capacity to critically engage with knowledge constructs, processes and procedures, and the degree of their consistency with educational aims and values rather than their productivity in generating pre-determined learning outcomes. Assessment should not be based on a conclusive set of criteria, but on divergent perspectives about examinations conducted or solutions constructed emanating out of learners' own experiences through engaging practically with knowledge and with their emotions. Therefore assessment should gauge learning that contributes to the formation of the learner's mind and emotions through critical inquiry, based on their personal feelings and opinions. Assessment of learning should be an intrinsic part of teaching and cannot be separated from it. Teaching should therefore adopt principles and procedures that deal with cultural content in classrooms, which is aimed at protecting and fostering critical thinking and reflective dialogue amongst learners that could in turn enable them to access culture as a resource for developing their own understanding of their realities. What this implies is that teaching should deal with the factual components of the realities in which learners find themselves that would assist them to interpret the dominant features and basic resources on

which their lives depend as well as introduce them to different life styles. Teaching should use examples from history of societies that perpetuated injustices, the actions of people who fought for justice and human rights, and practices that involved or detracted from democratic principles. This process of teaching illuminates historical traditions and experiences, which serve to recover the notion of moral visions that give meaning to forms of self- and social transformation (Giroux, 1989:40). This mode of assessment places ethical discourse in a historical context and assists in developing learners' understanding of emancipatory practices and practices that undermine the rights and freedom of individuals. This process would also combine the many virtues found in friendships, love and association with a commitment to the values of freedom, respect and self-determination (Giroux, 1989: 38). Through critical and reflective teaching, learners are assisted in developing a language of morality and ethics that could enable them to imagine, define and develop a democratic vision that has the potential of transforming their realities.

Teachers should take responsibility for critical standards in the classroom not by predicting standardised outcomes, but by developing criteria that respond critically to students' thinking as it unfolds and manifests itself in their work. Elliot (1998: 110) corroborates this view by stating that the establishment of conditions for developing individual reflective, critical and creative thinking could foster a process of learning where teachers influence the learning outcomes through negotiation and consensus. The implication is that the teacher controls the direction of learning without pre-determining its precise outcomes and, through assessment, attempts to assist learners in generating outcomes of critical, reflective thinking. This ascribes the task of appraisal to the improvement of the learner's capacity to work to such criteria by critical reaction to work done. The progression of learning is gauged by the learners' ability to move in directions that gives greater meaning to their lives as opposed to measuring learning progression against the attainment of pre-set learning outcomes.

The design of an assessment programme should be developed around the realities of learners in a particular class that could vary from class to class. This implies that assessment should have organic connections to the challenges that

learners face in their daily lives and that assessment standards and goals be determined in conjunction with learners, based on their own experiences. The implication of this is that learners might respond differently to a text or questions and derive or create different solutions to a problem because of their diverse experiences, however, this should not lead to their being penalised for their responses but instead to a validation of their views. This practice reinforces principles of democracy and legitimacy in that learners are involved in decision making that involves how and according to which criteria they will be assessed. It also incorporates concepts of compromise and consensus in deciding what is to be assessed and how it will be assessed. Issues of transparency and inclusivity are addressed because learners are actively involved in setting assessment objectives. Issues of power and authority are also addressed in that learners are given the power to respond from a position of authority about how they experience their own learning. This notion of assessment underpins the idea of rational dialogue and departs from instrumental approaches that determine pre-set outcomes for learner achievement.

Assessment should further create spaces for individuality in that learners should be allowed to express themselves in the method that they feel most confident with, for example, visually, orally, in writing or graphically. This implies that teachers should not only employ one method when appraising learners, but that they should accommodate different ways in which learners, through experience, have come to relate and translate their understanding of, and insight into, situations and phenomena. However, this does not mean that learners should not be exposed to other methods of assessment, but rather that the teaching and learning experience should guide them towards different ways of making sense or creating meaning, thereby empowering them in different forms of expression and enhancing literacy through the utilisation of various mediums. By using different methods of assessment teachers would be creating spaces for other learners in the class to become involved in meaningfully appraising their peers, as they are allowed to reflect on the responses and supply valuable critique to each other. They could also begin to form links with their own interpretations, which consolidates their experiences and relationships, as they come to understand that their own realities or expositions are similar to others and that

they are not isolated. This does not alienate learners from the assessment experience, but serves to affirm and validate their own experiences by enabling them to play a central role in critiquing themselves and each other. Assessment becomes a process of action that accommodates the individuality of learners, while at the same time cultivating a sense of mutual respect, friendships and community.

Assessment is a social activity and should facilitate dialogue between teachers and learners, teachers and other teachers, and between learners themselves. This implies that teachers at a school should develop consistent practices when assessing learners, so that practices of assessment become part of the culture at the school, a habit of doing that does not confuse learners as to what is expected of them and how they should respond in different classes. I am not advocating for uniform strategies and methods for creating meaning or constructing knowledge, as teachers and learners are diverse, but rather for consistent practices that have the potential of illuminating learning experiences and consolidating understanding of different realities and concepts. Assessment as a social activity also implies that all learners should be involved in not only developing an assessment strategy and programme, but that they should be involved in the analyses of the assessment result with the aim of supporting further learning and teaching goals. This not only refers to learning or teaching progression, but also to strategies collaboratively put in place that would support the learning experience or lead to greater understanding, clarification and insight.

Assessment as a social activity implies that the achievement or understanding of learners is not a private matter, but a process that involves teachers, parents and possibly peers. Learners and teachers should develop the virtues of respect, trust, sensitivity and compassion when engaged in the assessment task and assessment result. This would necessitate the creation of a caring and nurturing environment in which the morals and values of learners will be harnessed. The process of critical action through reflective dialogue fosters this kind of moral development in that learners and teachers bring into their discourse those values and morals that define their experiences and enable them to negotiate acceptable ethical behaviour that will guide future interaction and dialogue.

Therefore learners know that their arguments, views or expositions will be treated with respect and that their future development will be nurtured in a caring way, and teachers know that learners and parents would appreciate and value their critique. Assessment becomes an action process for learning knowledge and skills within structures of solidarity that provide the basis for constructing imaginative possibilities of community. For assessment to be regarded as a social activity would imply the development of different forms of knowledge and moral character that would find expression in forms of self- and social empowerment that encourages people to participate critically in shaping society. This implies expanding human possibilities to improve the quality of people's lives and also extending the meaning of freedom.

Authority is closely linked to democracy and as such teachers need to reconstruct views of how authority manifests itself in classrooms. Giroux (1989: 72) posits that, in doing this, teachers will need to reconstruct a language of critique in order to challenge components of learners' realities and a language of possibility that provides the theoretical scaffolding for learning. Therefore, what is needed is the development of a dialectical view of authority and ethics, which would serve as a reference for critique and which could provide a vision for educational and social change. The whole notion of authority and ethics should be linked to legitimate democratic practices, teaching and practical learning, thereby making the role of democracy the rationale for discourse in classrooms, schools and broader society.

5.4 CONCLUSION

I contend that critical theory translates into actions that encourage the caring, nurturing, trust and respect that are needed to harness learners who will engage in rational dialogue morally and ethically. I further contend that education that is rooted in critical action has the potential to stimulate the imagination of learners and enhance their capacities to critically engage with each other and with knowledge constructs, which would not only facilitate an understanding of the deeper meaning of their realities and the world around them, but also enable

them to formulate different and changed possibilities that could begin to transform their realities.

Greene, Nussbaum and Sherman postulate that, in order for critical teaching and learning to transpire, the development of critical thinking as an ethical undertaking, which would lead to creative intelligence as part of the development of moral character, would be imperative. Therefore, in their assessment practices teachers should cultivate a culture for critical, rational, reflective and deliberative dialogue and harness moral character that would foster friendships based on caring, sharing and commitment. This could have the potential of not only developing the critical and emotional capacities of learners, but also the potential to engender critical citizens who, through deliberate action, can begin to transform society.

CHAPTER 6

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter directs me to my research question of how critical action, as the antithesis of the instrumentality that is mostly linked with assessment practices in OBE, can engender educational transformation. In previous chapters I attempted to outline why assessment in OBE with its prescribed and pre-determined outcomes cannot evolve into meaningful transformation. As an instrumental approach to teaching and learning, it impedes democratic practices in classrooms and constrains active and meaningful learning. I also attempted to explore non-instrumental actions that have the potential of developing critical citizens who can through their actions begin to alter their own realities and contribute to the transformation of society. In this chapter I shall explore possibilities for critical action and show how imagination, deliberation and friendship can potentially shape the teaching and learning experience in classrooms. I shall further attempt to outline some of the implications of critical assessment (as opposed to instrumental assessment practices) for classroom pedagogy, that is, teaching and learning.

6.2 POSSIBILITIES FOR CRITICAL ACTION AND THE IMPLICATION OF CRITICAL ASSESSMENT FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Assessment in OBE tends to confine reflection, critical thinking and rationality to technical control and this detracts from notions of critical action that actively engages learners to understand and change their destiny by taking control of their own choices and actions. An instrumental justification of education attains technical control to maintain uniform standards and outcomes, and to improve administrative control that Habermas (in Bernstein, 1985: 41) regards as unhistorical and irrelevant to the experiences of learners. He propagates a shift from a model that confines rationality to determinate rules towards a model of practical rationality that emphasises the role of judgmental interpretation, choice

and decision-making. Practical rationality does not imply reflection confined to technical prescriptions but a rationality that would enable learners to critically question, debate, reason and exercise judgment that requires the explication of values and accepting the responsibility to justify such action. This entails a shift to a model of practical reasoning grounded in critical inquiry that would enable learners to apply responsible judgment in determining when things are acceptable and when they are not. Practical rationality is not an action that develops automatically, but an action that teachers should nurture in a caring and sensitive environment through a process of deliberation. For learners to develop judgmental capacities for effective decision-making would necessitate an environment that allows learners to express themselves in an unrestricted manner, and creates conditions conducive to freedom of action and freedom of expression. Berlin (1975: xlii) concurs that freedom is not only cultivated through spontaneous rational activity, but that it is a state that evolves from the opportunity to act, that is, creating opportunities for the possibility of action and the freedom to act. This implies that teachers should create spaces that provide learners with the opportunity to exercise their freedom to act. The implication is that classroom practices should not detach learners from their own learning but involve them through processes of consultation, negotiation and consensus. Consensus does not imply that discussion comes to an end and that definite solutions have been found, but that the dialogue continues as circumstances, conditions, perceptions and opinions are ever-changing entities. Assessment that propagates the mastery of pre-determined outcomes limits the scope of learners to engage in deliberation and it has the potential of undermining rational reflection. Carr and Hartnett (1996: 197) support this view when arguing that pre-determined outcomes reduce effective teaching and learning to achieving objectives, outcomes and attainment of targets, which is an instrumental notion. Democratic practices evolve not by controlling and directing what learners are to do or how they are to think, but through the development of a democratic culture which provides learners with opportunities to solve practical, moral and social problems through joint activity and collective decision making. In their classroom practices teachers should create opportunities for learners to act, which implies that they should be afforded the opportunity to take the initiative, to begin processes and to make proposals or come up with possible solutions that

requires imagination and constant reflection. Therefore transformative classroom practice should create spaces for practical discourse, grounded in critical action, to encourage the development of social attitudes, skills and character that would enable learners to deliberate about and recreate changed possibilities by challenging their own interpretations and prejudices, and confronting shared problems and mutual concerns.

Critical action would involve co-operative and active participation in designing goals for teaching and learning. This could foster a greater understanding of the dialectical and dialogical relationships in the teaching and learning experience and also a greater understanding of the self. Gadamer (in Bernstein, 1985: 37) posits that understanding is part of the total human experience of the world and that understanding cannot be appropriated through methods of objectification that dictate interpretation or critical awareness. Therefore understanding cannot be appropriated independently from actions grounded in one's own experiences, as knowledge, truth and morality exist in relation to culture, society and historical context. Objectifying understanding would be subjecting reason to preset goals and displacing or freeing it from its historical context. Reason and understanding are not detached from the person but determined by him or her, making reason a historically situated entity that gains power within a living tradition (Bernstein, 1985: 37). Therefore reason is rooted in the realities of human experiences and it is these experiences that should give expression to action that determines the relevance for teaching and learning. Gadamer argues that action cannot be divorced from the act of understanding as every act of understanding involves interpretation and all interpretation involves action. Critical action, understanding and interpretation are therefore not three distinct elements of hermeneutics, but an essential moment of the hermeneutic experience (Bernstein, 1985: 38). Teaching, learning and assessment goals should therefore actively involve learners and incorporate their visions of what is considered relevant for their own learning experiences.

Technical rationality degrades practical reason to technical control and places decision-making outside the context of learners and teachers. Good action would seek to develop the skill of practical deliberation rooted in our histories, as this

has the potential of developing character and mental abilities that enable us to expropriate an understanding of knowledge; it is this mental capacity that grounds our interpretation and application, and allows us to open ourselves to the truths that speak to us through the traditions of our histories (Bernstein, 1985: 39). We throw light upon our contexts through engaging with these realities that lead to self-examination and self-understanding. Practical reason as an element of critical action is therefore distinct from technical prescriptions that distort what transformative practice should be. Gadamer (Bernstein, 1985: 41) posits that deliberation and reason are rational activities about those issues that define our realities and not the results of responses to prescribed outcomes. This dialogue allows us to open ourselves to risks by testing our own opinions and prejudices, and self-understanding is achieved through the dialectical encounter with others. Therefore during this process of reflective dialogue individuals experience freedom that is realised only when there is mutual recognition among individuals (Bernstein, 1985: 163). This state of freedom results in a solidarity that strengthens bonds of friendship because, in our quest to understand we stand together and are affected by the situation. Gadamer cites Hegel that freedom is the capacity to understand our histories and the possibility of ever renewing or changing that history in a never-ending quest for this freedom (in Bernstein, 1985: 164). Therefore assessment that facilitates the freedom to act in an attempt to understand our histories opens up possibilities of engaging in a dialogue about different and improved realities. The instrumental nature of assessment in OBE sacrifices this freedom in defence of its minimum required standards and objectives. Freedom is affected by prescriptive activities and attitudes towards it, and instrumentality seeks to extend realities by applying empirical systems of certainty to learning, development, performance and progress.

Bernstein (1985: 162) defines a dialogue as a process of two or more people trying to understand each other. Therefore during each conversation, whether it is about goals for teaching and learning or about virtues for action, people open themselves up to other persons, accept their views as worthy of consideration and get inside the other to the extent that they understand the views of others, what they say and their realities. They need to grasp the objective rightness or

otherwise of each other's opinions before they can agree or disagree with each other on a subject. The act of trying to grasp something or understanding another's view would involve reflection and debate, and the virtues of discrimination, reason, empathy and consideration, which are inherent in acts of critical inquiry. Gadamer stresses that this kind of dialogue is fundamental for grasping what is distinctive about hermeneutical understanding and reinforces common bonds, mutuality, respect and willingness to listen and understand what the other is saying (in Bernstein, 1985: 162). What Gadamer propagates is not some limited and parochial sense of understanding, but a dynamic rational action that pervades all our activities in the process of trying to understand, always in conversation as part of the dialogical relationship between teaching and learning. Central to this understanding is a dialogical character of this rationality that stresses the practical communal character of this rationality, which involves choices, deliberation, interpretation, judicious weighing and application of criteria that are considered relevant and most important (Bernstein, 1985: 172). Weighing the consequences of our actions for others would indicate that this kind of dialogue is serious and would require a moral character that is prepared and willing to talk and listen to others. Rorty (in Bernstein, 1985: 203) states that this kind of conversation should not attempt to reach some sort of rational consensus or be driven by the urge to get things right, because the answers that we come up with are possibilities, which may work and are subject to change. Therefore, what dialogue should involve is the continued possibility of conversation, of action between people trying to understand what he calls "the radical contingency of the social practices" (in Bernstein, 1985: 203) that define what they are and continue to imagine different possibilities for the future. What Rorty suggests is that there are no absolute truths and therefore conversation should never reach a stage of definite closure, but that we continue to design possibilities which create the hope that realities can be different. This understanding of dialogue challenges doctrines that equate conceptual progress and development to permanent pre-set outcomes that were designed as historically neutral phenomena. It enables us to become sensitive to the continuous challenges of different paradigms and perceptions that are never static. This understanding requires continuous dialectical action between our own pre-understandings and the forms of life we are trying to understand and the possibilities we are trying to create. It is in this

way that we can risk and test our own prejudices in an attempt not only to understand difference better but also ourselves.

What follows from this is that in their classroom practices teachers should continuously open up spaces for conversation that would endow learners with practical wisdom to learn from what is different. Habermas (in Bernstein, 1985: 187) calls this an opportunity to engage in conversation, a communicative freedom that can only transpire under the moral-practical aspect of responsibility that emerges from action through deliberative dialogue and not through technical prescriptions, that is, a matter of cultivating critical as opposed to instrumental action. The curriculum and assessment can never remain static, but need to undergo a continuous process of change not only because the realities of learners are different, but also because the political, social and economic conditions and needs of society are constantly changing. Pre-set or pre-determined goals seem to negate the fact that life, perceptions and standpoints are constantly changing and therefore education as such cannot subject itself to a standardised set of criteria that captures learners in a type of a time capsule. Teachers together with learners should continuously set new goals for teaching and learning.

By setting goals and objectives for teaching, learning and assessment without the involvement of learners implies subjecting them to goals and rules like slaves. It also implies that these goals are divorced from their visions, aspirations and values and therefore detract from rational action. Setting goals for learning without the involvement of learners can restrict the development and realisation of their capacities for rational decision-making as well as their desire for full self-realisation. For assessment to be considered as a rational activity would imply an attempt to create harmony between the abilities, aspirations, choices and characters of learners to enable them to understand their own situations and that of others better. Rationality in this context means freedom for self-realisation that will serve as an impetus for learners to understand themselves, situations and people. Teachers therefore need to establish classroom social relationships in which learners are able to challenge, engage with and question the learning process, thereby giving them the opportunity to produce what is relevant for their

own learning. In their assessment practices teachers need to nurture the decision-making and cognitive capacities of learners in a caring manner. This would be giving recognition to learners as human beings and create a sense that they are not non-entities, but valuable individuals whose needs are important and recognised. It is this recognition that creates respect, trust, friendships, solidarity, caring and mutual understanding, which translates into the social and moral responsibility that enables learners to co-operatively design imaginative possibilities that may begin to alter their realities. Berlin (1975: 178) corroborates the fact that peoples' moral and cognitive capacities can only develop when they are given opportunities of freedom to act and exercise their choices. In this regard he cites John Stuart Mill that "man (*sic*) is capable of choice, one who is most himself when choosing and not being chosen for; the rider and not the horse; the seeker of ends and not merely of means, ends that he pursues, each in his own fashion: with the corollary that the more various these fashions, the richer the lives of man become; the larger the field of interplay between individuals, the greater the opportunities of the new and the unexpected; the more numerous the possibilities for altering his own character in some fresh or unexplored direction, the more paths open before each individual, and the wider will be his freedom of action and thought". Therefore to subject learners to pre-set goals would be to shut the doors of meaningful learning to them, and to constrain full freedom of opinion and choice would be to prevent the growth of conditions conducive to rational deliberation. Learners mould their own character through the freedom of deliberation with others in a non-constricted manner and subjecting them to prescriptions would be stunting their freedom of action and thought, which could restrict the development of critical citizens that have the capacity and the will to transform society.

The idea that teachers should give recognition to, and incorporate the realities of, learners into a programme for teaching and learning brings me to Freire's use of generative words (Freire & Macedo, 1998: 106). This involves taking words that children are familiar with in their everyday lives and working around them to eventually cover a whole curriculum. For instance, a word such as "house" can be used to define meaning in different contexts and be linked to the various learning areas. Mathematics can, for instance, calculate (by means of addition,

subtraction, division and multiplication) the statistics of families in households, communities, provinces and countries and, work out the square meterage or angles of different shapes of housing. Natural Science can include issues around water, health and electricity in the home. History can incorporate concepts of why houses are different in various communities, how and why communities were established and how governance and decision-making affects the provisioning of services and amenities. Technology can include different structures for housing. By working with generative words in a problem-posing fashion, particular concepts are not imposed on learners, but they attain greater understanding as they interact with words and concepts according to their own understanding of their realities. Whatever meaning learners have created can now be linked to broader issues so as to enable them to understand and analyse the realities of other contexts. During this whole process of inquiry and discovery learners get the opportunity to work as individuals and to interact with others. When learners are assessed, the concept has greater meaning in that they are able to visualise it in terms of their own experiences. Planning a teaching, learning and assessment programme around generative words is one way of ensuring that learning does not become a rigid, irrational process but a critical, conscious exposition of events that manifests itself through the continuous interaction of learners with their own realities. Therefore learners acquire an imaginative attitude to learning by creating and re-creating intervention possibilities that lead to self-transformation. Evaluation becomes self-initiated as learners have the need to discuss their findings with each other (in groups or as individuals), to compare notes and to assess each other's capacity and how it relates to what they think they had to achieve. This process does not only create opportunity to act, but also instils in learners a sense of self-discipline and respect for other views, and creates opportunities to know each other through constant communication. Rogers (1969: 20) states that, if learners are given the opportunity to progress towards self-actualisation in a framework of freedom that is self-directed, "there is greater opportunity for self-growth, not only creativity, initiative, imagination, but self-discipline, self-acceptance and understanding".

The official curriculum with its predetermined outcomes makes education controllable, because the structure of this official knowledge becomes a structure

of social authority, which perpetuates instrumentality. The official curriculum and assessment practices (which I have shown, in my conceptual and empirical studies, are related to current practices in schools) subject learners to an environment of rules, test requirements, corrections and language structures, which establishes the authorities as the ones in charge. I regard this instrumentality as a form of symbolic violence, because it is based on control, manipulation and subordination. The didactic lecture in many instances precedes the prescribed assessment standards and dominates as the educational form of containing teaching and learning inside the official consensus, a notion that runs counter to critical action. I consider the lecture-based, passive curriculum as poor educational practice and a teaching model synonymous with promoting the dominant authority in classrooms, which disempowers learners and impoverishes education. Material brought to learners is often content that might be disorientating to them and it is often written in academic language and in an English they do not understand and use. The introduction of knowledge to them in this manner has the tendency of separating description from understanding, which I regard as a form of controlling the consciousness of learners. The result, in many instances, is that they withdraw into passive compliance and become uncritical subjects, which is the antithesis of critical action.

Teachers should introduce ideas to learners in a problem-posing manner and allow them to bring matter to the classroom pertaining to those issues, thereby allowing them the freedom to act. The potential exists that they would critically engage with these issues as collectives and start discovering new concepts and developing a new language with the teacher in an initiating, facilitating, guiding, and mentoring capacity. Learners would then begin not only to read words and describe what they have read, but they would begin to read and dynamically interact with reality, which has the potential of expanding their horizons while at the same time providing depth to their insights. This process of critical action ensures that learners become active agents in the expropriation of knowledge. Engaging and explicating with knowledge constructs in this manner has the potential of making greater sense to learners, thereby rendering the teaching and learning experience more relevant to them. The success of this notion would

necessitate a variety of resources and material made available to learners in classrooms, as some might come from communities where resources are lacking. Assessment in this context would be to gauge the ability of learners to do meaningful research, to critically engage with concepts and their capacity of reflective interaction. Assessment would also be to determine the capacity of learners to apply and integrate their construction of new ideas with other learning areas and translate it into action.

Greater collegiality amongst teachers at a school can lead to various imaginative ways of creating a programme for teaching, learning and assessment involving the ideas of learners, rather than excluding, alienating and subjecting them to prescriptions and pre-set goals. Teachers need to reflect on the way their interpretations of classroom life are shaped by official structures of the curriculum and assessment procedures. They need to explicate those structures, which serve to legitimate their activities and mask the structural characteristics that shape and reproduce their practices in classrooms. Teachers also need to rework those aspects of the curriculum in which democratic possibilities exist and at the same time allow learners to conduct critical analyses of those characteristics that reproduce inequitable social relations.

6.3 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I contend that, although OBE provides South Africa with a uniform framework for teaching and learning, its theory and principles of pre-set outcomes traps educational relationships in paradigms of control and manipulation. Although OBE seeks to improve the effectiveness of the curriculum delivery process, it also effects greater control of teaching and learning goals, which has the potential of steering schools further away from becoming learning organisations that engage individuals. Although the Assessment and Curriculum Statements are imbued with language that promises the development of a democratic ethos and practice in classrooms, their pre-determined and prescribed goals restrict and constrain effective and meaningful teaching and learning, and perpetuate structures of confined power in classrooms.

I further contend that it is only through critical action that teachers can encourage and propagate practices grounded in the democratic values of freedom, equality and justice. Through allowing the sharing of individuals' personal knowledge, reflective dialogue has the potential to develop critical learners who can begin to take an unrestricted journey forward and begin to transform their realities. Teachers need to abolish those invisible boundaries in their classroom practices through building relationships of trust and friendship in their pursuit of democratic values that have the potential not only to guide learners towards self-actualisation, but also towards critical citizenry. Classrooms therefore, need to become vibrant domains of different voices and opinions that encourage dreaming, imagining and the conscious envisaging of images of a better life. Only then could education have the potential of engendering critical citizens who can begin to transform their communities in a meaningful way. This does not mean that we need to abandon OBE but, rather find ways as to how critical action can begin to trouble instrumentalists interpretations of OBE and how best we as teachers can enact meaningful educational transformation.

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